



Grow *your* Groceries

40 Hacks
for Growing
Plants
from Your
Weekly Shop



**Simon
Akeroyd**

1.5 million
followers on
TikTok and
Instagram

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How to use this eBook

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Introduction

Growing your own food is so rewarding. Not only does it save money, but the excitement of seeing your seedlings germinate, or your plant break from dormancy, and produce a flower or fruit is a buzz that never lessens.

Grow Your Groceries features 40 hacks for growing edibles from your weekly shop, including fruit, veg, herbs, and even dried seeds and pulses, based on many of the videos and reels I've posted on my social media channels. My kitchen windowsills and garden are full of foliage, flowers, and fruits grown from ingredients I have bought at the shops.

I've included my top 40 in this book, but there are hundreds of others you can try. Once you've mastered the basic principles, you will be scanning those grocery aisles every time you shop, to see what else you can add to your burgeoning grow-your-own garden. Just a few purchases at the supermarket should set you up with an almost endless supply of seeds, cuttings, and plants, making you as self-sufficient as possible. You could find yourself needing to rely far less on shopping from the big supermarket chains, thereby saving money.

With some fruit and veg, such as mangoes, pineapples, and avocados, you might not get to harvest any fruit, as they can take years to become productive. Some might be sterile or need other pollinators to produce fruit. But it doesn't matter, as you will still end up with a beautiful houseplant.

Recycling is at the heart of everything I do when it comes to gardening. Very often it is the part of the ingredient that would usually be thrown away which is used for growing, for example seeds from a butternut squash or the root base from an onion, leek, or cabbage – meaning you get to eat your shopping and grow it, too.

It is not just supermarket produce that can be recycled; it's the containers it is grown in. Everything in this book can be grown in recycled plastic containers or toilet roll tubes, not to mention old plastic flowerpots you already have at home. There is no need to buy expensive terracotta or porcelain pots, or pricey compost or plant food. It doesn't have to look pretty: the objective is to grow food sustainably and enjoy it. The key ethos behind every hack in this book is sustainability. See the following pages for advice on recycling containers, composting, and getting started.

One final warning, growing plants from the supermarket is addictive. Never again will you look at an apple, onion, or corn on the cob in the shop and fail to wonder about the possibilities for growing it. It's fun, exciting, good for your health, and offers a fascinating insight into the food that we so readily accept from the supermarket.

Happy grocery shopping, happy growing, and happy eating.



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How plants grow

and how we can help

Many of the ingredients you buy from the fresh fruit and veg aisles at the supermarket or grocery store are bursting with potential energy, ready to grow and reward you with delicious, edible crops if you provide them with the right conditions.

In fact, it's not just the fresh food aisles. If you look carefully in the frozen and dried food sections there are seeds, pulses, frozen fruits, and more, much of which can be propagated from and grown as plants to supply you with more food. All you need to do is bring your groceries home and give them the right environment and some TLC to enable them to grow.

Plants have three basic requirements in order for them to start growing. These are warmth, light, and water. If you can provide plants (including many of your groceries) with these three conditions, they should thrive.

The good news is that you don't need a garden to grow many of the plants I've included in this book. In many cases all you need is access to a tap and a sunny windowsill. Some of the larger plants will need larger pots to allow them to get bigger, but that is basically it.

Although most plants require light to grow, be aware that direct sunlight through the window can scorch the foliage of plants. This is particularly the case with young seedlings. Very often a plant requires a "light" room, but not necessarily in direct contact with the sun's rays, which are intensified through glass.

Water seeds after sowing, and after they germinate and start to develop. The amount you water will vary depending on the plant and the temperature. A good way to gauge whether a plant needs watering is to push your finger into the compost. If the soil feels dusty and doesn't stick to your finger, then the plant will benefit from a quick drink.

Let there be light (and some water and warmth)

Peat-free compost

Throughout this book I have recommended using peat-free, generalpurpose compost. Commercial compost manufacturers always used to add peat. This naturally occurring material has taken thousands of years to form, and it provides an essential habitat for rare flora and fauna. Extraction from fragile, finite, and ever-diminishing areas of peat are of major ecological and environmental concern. So when you are buying, look out for “peat-free” compost. The bags are usually clearly labelled. This means that no peat has been added to the mix.

Of course, the best type of compost you can use is homemade. Not only does it cost you nothing, but it is a good way of recycling kitchen and garden waste. You don't need much room to make compost. I have a small, rotating dual compost system on a stand. I fill one, and let the other decompose into garden compost.

The key to good compost is getting a 60:40 ratio of green to brown material. Greens can include any of the following: grass clippings, kitchen scraps (from vegetables and fruit, not dairy or meat), and herbaceous plant materials. Browns include cardboard (remove any plastic tape or labels),

fallen leaves (loads in autumn), and woodchips. In order to speed up the rate of decomposition, chop up any material as small as you can.

The other speed accelerator is to turn the compost regularly with a fork (or use a rotating drum like I do – it's much easier). This will add air into the compostable material.



Raising new plants for free

Providing your plants with an environment where they can germinate or grow from cuttings is key to successfully growing your groceries at home. One method of encouraging healthier and better germination rates is to make a small propagator to keep indoors.

Propagators are containers or boxes that provide additional warmth to encourage seeds to germinate and cuttings to produce roots and grow.

They aren't essential for many of the plants you can grow at home. But using one will help your seedlings get off to a faster start, producing earlier crops so you can harvest and enjoy your homegrown food for longer.

You can of course buy fancy propagators, which have adjustable thermostats, temperatures, and vents – some even come with additional grow lights. However, I've found it is easy to upcycle plastic supermarket containers into propagators – the types that usually come with a lid and often contain muffins, biscuits, or salads. These otherwise disposable containers will provide a lovely cosy environment to get your groceries growing.

How to make a propagator

- + Use a skewer to make small drainage holes in the bottom of your container if it doesn't already have them.
- + Place it on a tray to catch any drips from the drainage holes when you water your seeds.

- + Fill your propagator with peat-free, general-purpose compost and sow your seeds into it.
- + Keep it on a sunny windowsill. Your seeds will easily sprout in the additional warmth provided by the propagator.
- + Water regularly and check the compost often. It may dry out more quickly than usual in the propagator.
- + On hot days, pop the lid open so that seedlings don't overheat or get scorched if it is in direct sun.

In winter, additional warmth can be harnessed by positioning your propagator on towels above a radiator. My radiators have covers, and the tops make brilliant shelves for my seeds to germinate. If you don't have radiators, you can place your propagator on a table on an electric blanket covered with sheets of foil.

How to make a mini greenhouse

Once you get the gardening bug, you will quickly find that all your available space indoors gets filled up with pots and trays of seedlings. Many of us would love additional growing space in a greenhouse or conservatory, but we don't have room.

One handy solution is to repurpose clear plastic storage crates, which you can often buy cheaply from discount shops. Put them outside on your patio, balcony, or porch and use them as mini greenhouses for your extra seedlings. Just remember to place a brick or some weight on them in order to prevent the box blowing away one windy night.

Milk carton cloches

To get your seedlings off to an early start you can use plastic milk cartons as cloches. I find the 4-pint containers (2.27 litres) are the perfect size. Cut through three sides, halfway down the bottle. The uncut side acts as a hinge, which you can fold back to give your seedlings light and air, or you can keep it closed to provide extra protection and warmth. Use a skewer to carefully make a few drainage holes in the bottom. You can then fill this section with peatfree compost.

Grower's starter kit

You don't need a large budget when you start gardening. Many of the items I use are things I've already got around the house. In fact the majority is surplus packaging, containers, and boxes I've been given when shopping. Instead of putting the materials in the recycling bin, I repurpose them in the garden.

Plant labels

I like to cut plastic milk cartons into 1 x 10cm ($\frac{1}{2}$ x 4in) strips to use as plant labels. Use a pencil to write plant names on the labels. Pencil doesn't wash off in the rain or during watering, unlike some pens, and you can reuse them the following year simply by rubbing off the writing with an eraser.

Plastic bottle watering cans

Plastic milk cartons can also be used as free watering cans. Use a skewer or a biro to punch lots of small holes in the lid, making a sprinkler. Then fill the carton with water and use it as a watering can. You can adjust the spray simply by squeezing the carton.

Cardboard seed pots

You don't just have to limit yourself to plastic cartons either. I use the 2-pint (1.4 litre) cardboard ones as well. They often contain plant milk. Lie the carton on its side and make drainage holes with a skewer on the bottom. Then use scissors or a knife to cut away the top. Fill with compost and you

have a simple container for growing seedlings – ideal for growing herbs on the kitchen windowsill when it is too cold outside.

Toilet roll tube seedling trainers

You don't need to buy expensive terracotta or "forever" plastic pots to grow your seedlings in. The cardboard tubes from toilet rolls are perfect for the purpose. You can fold the bottoms of the tubes inwards so that the compost doesn't fall out, but I find it isn't necessary if you simply hold your hand underneath when moving them, and once the roots have grown down it holds the compost together. Not folding the bottom makes it easier for the roots to grow downwards, too.

When it comes to planting, simply plant the entire thing; you don't need to remove the cardboard. Do make sure all the cardboard is covered with soil or compost. Otherwise, the exposed section above the ground can act like a wick and draw out any moisture in the soil, resulting in plants drying out.

Pallet raised beds

Unless you bulk shop, you are unlikely to receive wooden pallets. But you can often find them for free around the back of shops, supermarkets, and warehouses. Ask the owners; they are often happy for you to take pallets away. Make sure they are heat-treated pallets, not chemically treated ones, as you don't want anything unpleasant leaching into your compost. Look for a heat-treated (HT) logo.

Pallets can be used to create simple raised beds. Take the top slats off and nail them around the sides to retain the soil. Then simply fill the pallet

with compost and you have a ready-made, free raised bed. I've also made seed trays, potting benches, and trugs from free pallets.

Raised bed benefits

Raised beds are useful if you have poor soil in the garden. You can fill a raised bed with lovely compost that your plants will enjoy growing in. They also help improve drainage, and having a bed that bit higher can save on back-breaking bending over, too. They often warm up faster as they are off the ground, meaning you might get crops earlier, and they are less susceptible to frost, as warm air rises.

Drip trays

Many containers, such as ice cream cartons, margarine tubs, and plastic yoghurt lids can be used as trays to sit under your plant pots. The trays will catch drips or runoff from the bottom of your pots after they have been watered.

Feeding plants from waste

There is no need to spend money on plant food or fertilizer. It is in abundance all around you. If you live near a park or in the countryside, you can pick and bring home plants to make into free plant feed. Do always check with the landowner if necessary, and never take lots of plants – leave plenty for wildlife. You only need a small quantity to make plant feed.

My favourite plant to forage for is stinging nettles. The feed made from this is high in nitrogen, which will help your plants grow and produce lovely green leaves and stems. It is best to pick stinging nettles in the spring when they are making plenty of growth. You will need to arm yourself with a bag, secateurs or scissors, and a pair of gloves. It's also best to wear long sleeves, as it's easy to get stung on the arms.

Pick lengths of young stinging nettle stalks, including both stems and leaves. Bring them home and chop them in smaller pieces into a bucket. Once the bucket is full of nettles, top it up with water. Leave outside for a few weeks for the leaves to decompose and rot down in the water.

A warning: this liquid really stinks, so don't keep the bucket by your front door or you won't have many visitors! Once the liquid is a dark brown colour, you can decant it into repurposed plastic milk cartons. You can then add this concentrated liquid to your watering can once a week or fortnight.

Dilute one part nettle feed to ten parts water. Water around the root area of the plant from when it comes into growth until it is flowering or fruiting.

On a much smaller scale, you can collect fruit and vegetable scraps and leave them in water in a sealed container such as an ice cream tub for a few days to decompose, and then dilute it with water and feed your plants with it. I often do this with chopped banana skins, which are high in potassium and one of the key nutrients that plants require to produce flowers, fruit, and seed.

You can also occasionally dilute coffee granules from your cafetière and feed them to your plants. However, coffee is slightly acidic, so only do it occasionally, except for plants that like acidic conditions, such as cranberries and blueberries.

Collect water

There has certainly been an increase in the amount of rain falling from our skies in the last few years. Collect it, because it doesn't cost you anything, and furthermore it is (hopefully) free from any additional chemicals – unlike mains water, which will have been treated. Water butts can be attached to downpipes from the gutter to collect rainwater that lands on the roof. In many areas, local authorities will give you a free water butt.

On a much smaller scale, you can leave old containers, buckets, washingup bowls, or even teacups outside when it rains and use this to water the seedlings on your windowsills.

Save your teabags and coffee filters

You can dry out used teabags and coffee filters and use them instead of crocks (bits of broken pots) to place over drainage holes in your pots to stop

the compost washing out when you water them.

Collect leaves for leaf mould

Leaf mould is made from decomposed leaves and is great for adding to and bulking up your compost. It's another free resource, courtesy of Mother Nature, and there are millions of leaves dropping from the trees in autumn. Gather them up with a rake and put them into bin liners. Poke a few holes in the bottom of the bags and leave them outside for a year or so. When you come back to them you will have gorgeous leaf mould to use in your potting mixes.

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Veg Aisle

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Hack.01

Spring onions

from the roots

Don't discard the ends of your spring onions; those roots will grow again for a bonus harvest of chive-like stems. It's almost impossible not to get spring onions sprouting. So, if you don't have confidence in your green fingers just yet, this is the perfect beginner plant.

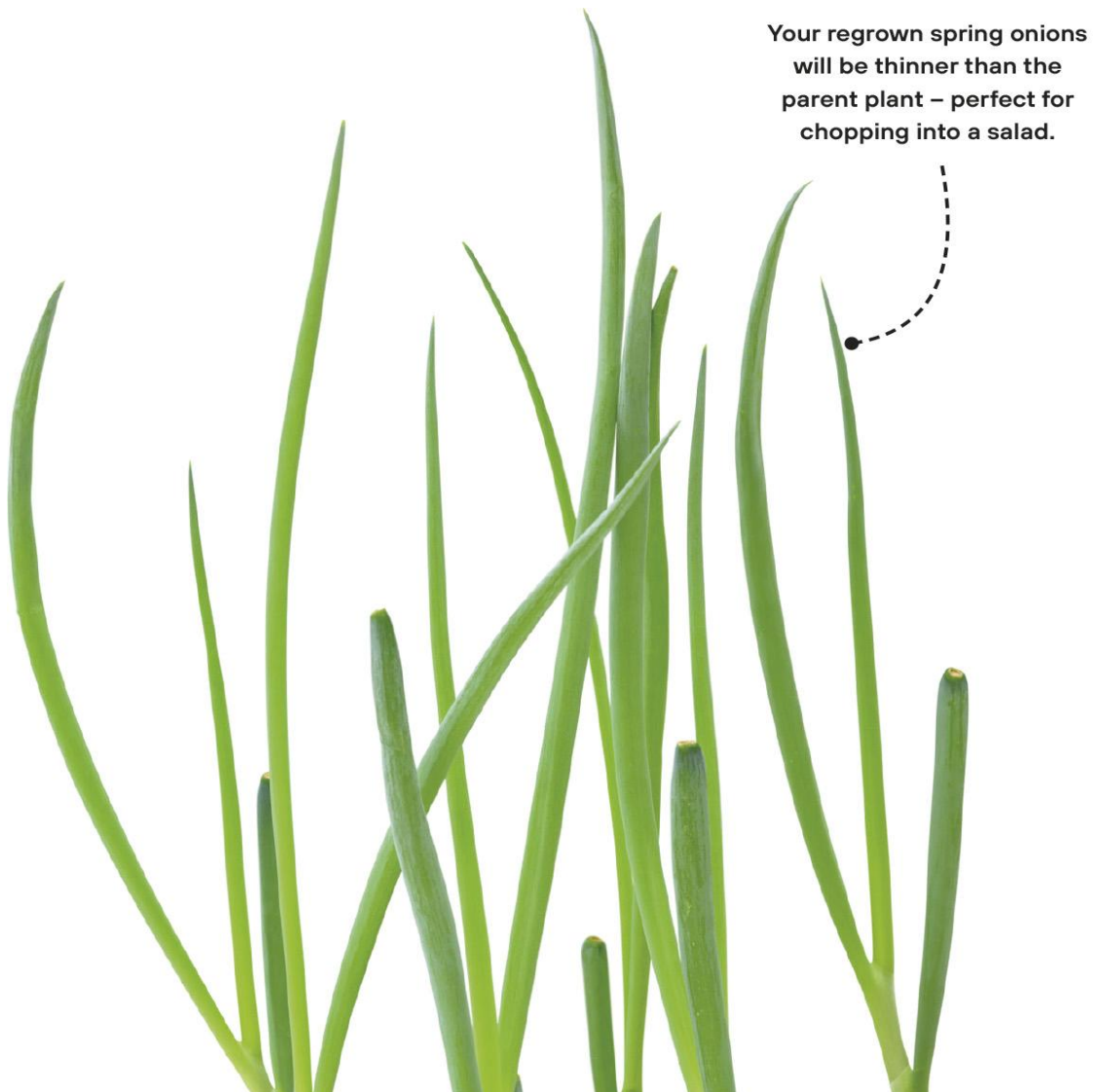
This technique seems to work at any time of the year, with plants taking up next to no room on the kitchen windowsill. You will be harvesting the fresh, green onion stems produced from the root plate, which provide a delicious, mild onion flavour in salads and savoury smoothies. Plants are unlikely to produce mini onion bulbs like the ones you bought. However, if you leave them long enough, they will eventually go to seed. And if you collect these seeds and sow in spring, the new plants will produce small bulbs.

You will need

- + Spring onion bunch
- + Sharp knife
- + Plant tray
- + Peat-free, generalpurpose compost
- + Toilet roll tubes (optional)

Know your plants

Also known as salad onions, green onions, or scallions, the spring onions you're most likely to find in the supermarket are simply normal onions – technical name *Allium cepa* – harvested at an early stage of development, before they've had a chance to form the distinctive bulbs that we peel and dice. If you're lucky, you may also find Welsh onions (*Allium fistulosum*), which naturally form bunches rather than bulbs, and some consider the “true” spring onion.





Your regrown spring onions will be thinner than the parent plant – perfect for chopping into a salad.

how to grow



01 Take your spring onion bunch and chop them off at the base, retaining about 2cm ($\frac{3}{4}$ in) of the white stem. If you look carefully, you will almost certainly see small roots at its base.



02 Fill a plant tray with peat-free, general-purpose compost. Spring onions are shallow rooting so only require compost to a depth of about 5cm (2in). I often recycle a supermarket container, adding drainage holes.



03 Push the spring onions into the soil by 1cm ($\frac{1}{2}$ in) so that just a stub appears above the surface, spacing each one 3cm ($1\frac{1}{4}$ in) apart. If you have a dibber, you can use it to make holes.



04 If you'd like tender white stems, place toilet roll tubes around each base. These protect the stems from light, causing them to remain white, a technique known as "blanching".



05 Keep on a sunny windowsill and water twice a week. Within a week you will start to see growth.



06 After about 20 days you will have fresh stems to harvest: simply snip them off with scissors. They will regrow after cutting. I've had the same spring onion plants on my windowsill for over a year now.

Let it thrive

Spring onions can be planted outside in the garden, too. Keep harvesting and they should continue to regrow throughout the

summer. Keep the area free of weeds to stop them competing for nutrients. I find planting spring onions (any onions for that matter) next to my carrots helps to keep away carrot fly (an annoying root pest that can destroy your carrots).

Freezer supply

If you want to store your spring onion stems for another time, chop the stems into 1cm ($\frac{1}{2}$ in) sections, tip them into a freezer-proof bottle, and place the bottle in the freezer. Amazingly, the chopped stems don't seem to stick together. There's no need to defrost, simply sprinkle directly over your dish. You can apply the same technique with chive stems. I often do this at the end of the season, for an almost endless supply of oniony stems in the freezer.

Hack.02

Lettuce

from the stalk

No salad is complete without some sort of lettuce leaves in my opinion, and whether you prefer crispheads, butterheads, cos, or Romaine you are spoilt for choice. Luckily for us, they are all easy to regrow from their bases – meaning you get two lettuces for the price of one.

Lettuces are fast growing, so they are a satisfying crop to grow for quick results. Always look for the freshest lettuce in the supermarket. You need one with the remains of a base or stalk (where the plant was cut away from the stem by the grower). Your lettuce will regrow delicious new, upright leaves, but are unlikely to recreate the original ball shape if you have chosen one of the tight-headed crisphead types such as an iceberg. Lettuces can be grown in a pot inside or outside, or you can grow them directly in the soil in your garden. They prefer full sunshine, but will tolerate some shade.

You will need

- + One lettuce
- + Sharp knife
- + Small bowl of water
- + Peat-free, general-purpose compost

+ Plant pots

Your regrown lettuce will
be happy either inside or
outside in the garden.



Your regrown lettuce will be happy either inside or outside in the garden.

how to grow



01 Cut the base of the lettuce away, leaving a 3cm (1¼in) stump.



02 Place the base into a bowl of water about 1cm ($\frac{1}{2}$ in) deep. Leave on a sunny windowsill. In about 10 days you will see new leaves emerging from the base of the lettuce.



03 Fill a plant pot with peat-free compost and plant the base of the lettuce at the same depth in the compost as it was in the water.



04 Place either on a sunny patio or keep on your windowsill.



05 Alternatively, if you have a garden, lettuces can be planted out directly into the soil, spaced 30cm (12in) apart.

Let it thrive

Water the lettuce a couple of times a week if growing inside, or during dry spells if outside. Keep a lookout for slugs and snails,

which love fresh lettuce leaves. Remove them by hand if you see them and place them where they can feed on weed leaves, or by the compost heap. Harvest the young, tender, lettuce leaves as they grow. Use a knife or secateurs to cut the leaves near the base. They should continue to regrow a few times after harvesting. Once they seem to have exhausted all their growing energy you can remove the lettuce from its pot and add it to your compost heap.

Hack.03

Tomatoes

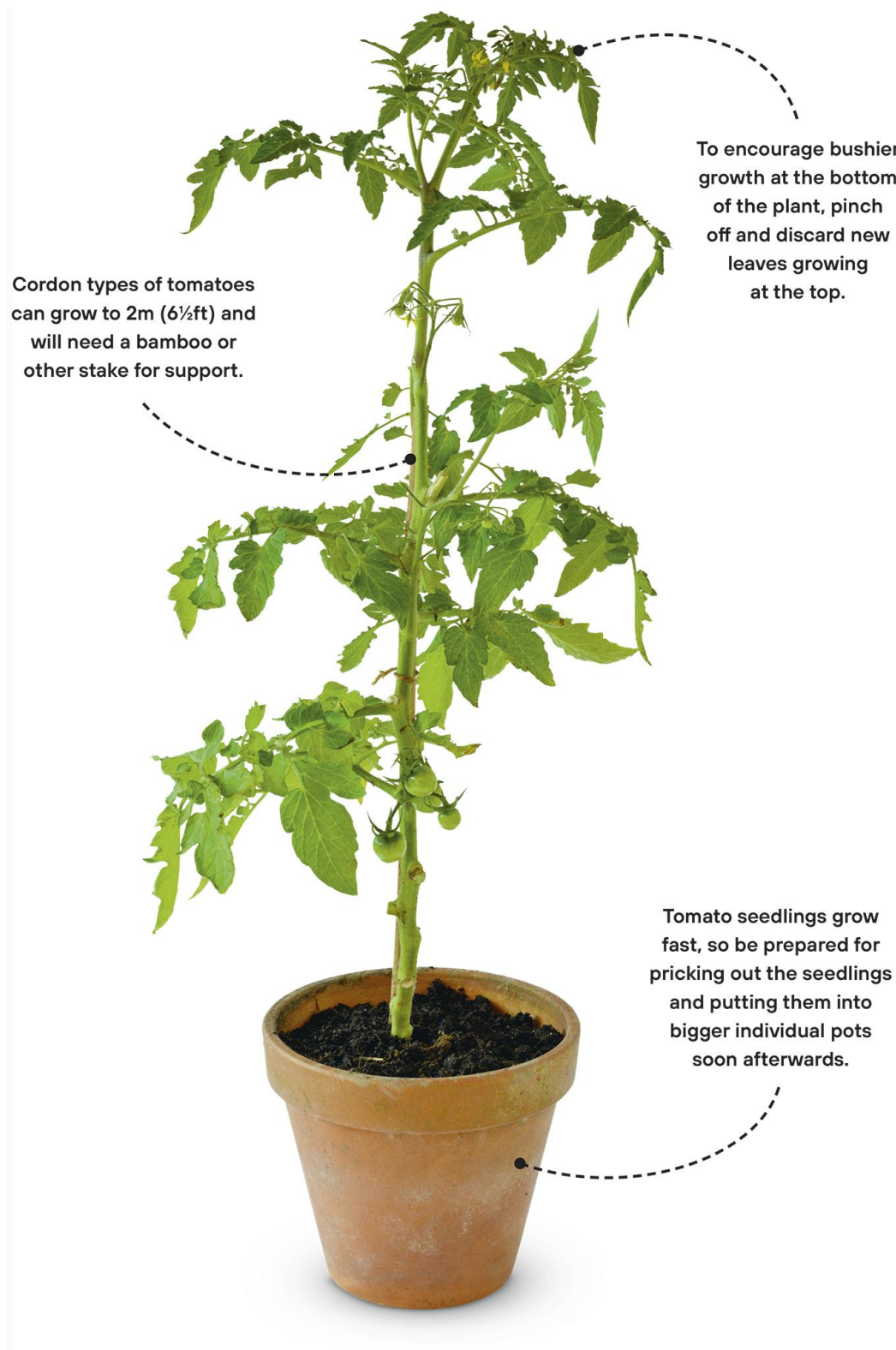
from slices of tomato

Nothing tastes better, in my opinion, than a tomato picked fresh from the vine that has been grown in your own soil and warmed by the sun, and they are so easy to grow. Enjoy the taste of the Mediterranean – starting with tomatoes from the shops.

Don't be put off if you think that supermarket tomatoes don't taste that great; this is usually because they are picked too early and kept in storage for too long. The varieties themselves (of *Solanum Lycopersicum*) are delicious. Getting tomato seeds to germinate is practically foolproof using this method. You might think it is a bit like adding tomato toppings to an earthy pizza – and the technique really is as simple as that.

You will need

- + Tomato
- + Sharp knife
- + Old grape container or other vessel
- + Peat-free, general-purpose compost
- + Plant pots



Cordon types of tomatoes can grow to 2m (6½ft) and will need a bamboo or other stake for support.

To encourage bushier growth at the bottom of the plant, pinch off and discard new leaves growing at the top.

Tomato seedlings grow fast, so be prepared for pricking out the seedlings and putting them into bigger individual pots soon afterwards.

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how to grow



01 Cut a few tomato slices about 3mm ($\frac{1}{8}$ in) thick. If you look closely you will see all the tiny seeds contained within each slice.



02 Fill a container with peat-free compost to a depth of 3cm (1¼in). I used old plastic grape containers. Whatever you use, make sure there are some drainage holes in the bottom.



03 Place a couple of tomato slices on the compost. Cover the slices with more compost to a depth of about 2cm ($\frac{3}{4}$ in).



04 Place on a warm sunny windowsill and water regularly. Soon you will see lots of seedlings poking up through the compost.



05 When the tomato plants have formed “true” leaves, they can be transplanted into individual pots. True leaves are different to the first pair of leaves you see when seedlings germinate. You will notice that they look distinct from the first leaves.



06 Keep the tomatoes in a warm sunny position until they are about 15cm (6in) high. Tomatoes are tender, so can be planted outside once the risk of frost is over. You can grow them in a container or two per growbag; I like to grow them directly in the soil.

Let it thrive

Tomatoes are usually either “cordon” types or bush types. All the tomatoes I have grown from the supermarket have been the former. Each cordon tomato plant will need a stake to support it as it grows. Pinch out the tops when they get to about 2m (6½ft) high to encourage a bushier plant below (and more fruit). Tomatoes will be ripe from midsummer onwards. If you are lucky enough to have a greenhouse or conservatory you can grow tomatoes there, and you will have a far longer growing season than if they were outside.

Hack.04

Avocado

from a seed

The avocado (*Persea americana*) is easy to grow from its large stone as a houseplant with attractive long, glossy leaves, but it is not so easy to get it to fruit in cooler countries – avocados originate from central and southern America and require a warm climate to bear fruit.

Technically avocados are fruits because their stone (seed) is in the centre of their flesh, but they are of course used in savoury dishes, and found in the vegetable aisle. If you live in a cool-climate country such as the UK, it is unlikely your avocado plant will ever produce fruit. That said, a gardener I know does get avocados from a plant that she sowed a few years ago, but she keeps the plant in a warm conservatory. You will probably have to be content with growing a beautiful houseplant and, if you get fruit, that's a bonus (it could take a number of years to produce fruit, too).

You will need

- + Avocado
- + Sharp knife
- + Freezer bag or plastic tub
- + Two-litre (3½ pint) plant pot
- + Peat-free, general-purpose compost



Grow your avocado seed
for beautiful foliage; it will
need heat to produce fruit.

Grow your avocado seed for beautiful foliage; it will need heat to produce fruit.

how to grow



01 Cut the avocado in half and carefully remove the large stone.
Rinse the stone.



02 Put the stone in a freezer bag or plastic tub. Put the bag in a dark cupboard and forget about it for a few weeks.



03 You will with luck discover that the avocado has started to germinate and has sent out a small shoot.



04 Plant the stone in peat-free compost about 2cm ($\frac{3}{4}$ in) deep, with the shoot pointing upwards. Water every few days. In a few weeks, the shoot will develop leaves and a single trunk.



05 Keep your avocado in a warm sunny location indoors and water it occasionally when the compost feels dry to the touch.



06 Feed with a general-purpose liquid feed once a week or if the leaves start to turn yellow.

Let it thrive

Avocados in their natural environment (a tropical climate) will grow into fairly large trees. If you are growing yours in a pot indoors as a houseplant, pinch the growing tip out when it reaches 40cm (16in) high. This will encourage bushier growth and restrict its size.

Hack.05

Celery

from the base

I love the crunchy stems of fresh celery (*Apium graveolens*). The base, usually thrown away, can easily be regrown at home. The new stems won't be as large as the ones you bought from the supermarket, but your smaller produce will be more succulent and a delicious addition to any salad or soup.

Celery is closely related to parsley and carrots and, like carrots, it is grown for its edible stems. It is best grown in spring so you can enjoy sticks of this refreshing vegetable throughout summer. However, I have also done this in autumn and planted the base outside, where it survived the winter and produced stems the following spring. Its natural habitat is damp, marshy conditions, so make sure you keep your plant well watered once it is established.

You will need

- + Head of celery
- + Sharp knife
- + Large jar or bowl
- + Peat-free, general-purpose compost
- + Plant pot

Don't discard the leaves:
they can be used to make
a lovely pesto.

Once you've grown celery,
instead of eating the stems you can
also let it flower and produce seed.
Celery seed can be harvested,
dried, and used as a spice.

For milder flavoured, pale
white stems you will need
to cover them up with soil,
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For milder flavoured, pale white stems you will need to cover them up with soil, called "blanching".

how to grow



01 Cut the base away from a whole head of celery.



02 Place the base in a jar or bowl with 1–2cm ($\frac{1}{2}$ – $\frac{3}{4}$ in) of water.



03 Leave on a sunny windowsill for a week or two.



04 You will notice stems starting to emerge from the centre of the base. You may also see new roots emerging from the base in the water.



05 Plant the base in a pot filled with peat-free compost and it will continue to grow new stems. Harvest the stems when they reach 10–15cm (4–6in) high. They should continue to produce stems throughout summer if you keep picking, and keep the plant watered every couple of days.



06 You can also plant the base outside, directly into the soil or a raised bed. If you have more than one, leave 30cm (12in) between each plant.

Blanching celery

If you want the white stems you see in the shops, then you will need to blanch them. To do this, use a rake to pile (“earth up”) the soil around the stems as they start to grow. Blocking out the sunlight should cause the stems to stay pale.

Hack.06

Potatoes

from tubers

This is possibly the most popular vegetable on the planet – and growing a potato (*Solanum tuberosum*) from the supermarket couldn't be easier. If you leave your potato in a bag in the back of a cupboard, you will find that it has started to send out shoots. Although this is not brilliant for cooking, it is perfect for planting outside to produce more potatoes.

Potatoes are the swollen root system of the plant, known as tubers, so your harvest will be underground – and you will need some outside space for this hack. To save on the back-breaking work of digging in the soil, I like to grow my potatoes in bin liners or old compost bags, as they take up hardly any space on my patio. You can of course plant them in containers and raised beds or buy specially made potato-growing bags.

You will need

- + Potatoes
- + Peat-free, general-purpose compost
- + Bin liner or old compost bag



If you're organized, you can
sow every couple of weeks
for a long cropping season.

If you're organized, you can sow every couple of weeks for a long cropping season.

how to grow



01 Leave the potatoes in a dark cupboard until they start to send out shoots; an old egg box is a handy way to store them.



02 Add 10cm (4in) peat-free compost to a large pot, bin liner, or compost bag. If using a bag, poke drainage holes in the bottom and roll down the sides about halfway.



03 Put three potatoes on the compost, followed by another 10cm (4in) compost. Place somewhere sunny outdoors and water weekly if it hasn't rained for a few days.



04 Earth up the potatoes once shoots emerge (see [box](#)). When flowers appear they can be harvested for early new potatoes; simply root around to find them, or tip out the contents of the bag. If you leave them longer they will grow larger, as you choose. The tubers will stop developing once the foliage has died down.



05 If growing in a pot, you will need to water the potatoes more often than those in the ground. Your potatoes won't grow as large as those grown in soil, so harvest when new.

Let it thrive

Potatoes originate from South America, and are hardy and suitable for our cooler and often rainier climates. I like to start

planting potatoes in mid-spring, as this gives you most of the season for the potatoes to grow. If you have room, you can plant a few potatoes every couple of weeks until midsummer to ensure you have a succession of crops throughout most of the growing season from midsummer to late autumn.

Earthing up

As shoots and leaves emerge, you will need to “earth up” the potatoes by adding more compost to just below the tops of the foliage. This will stop the new potatoes turning green, and will make more space for tubers to grow. If you’re growing in a bag, roll up the sides as you add more compost. Stop earthing up once the compost is at the top of the pot or bag.

Hack.07

Sweet potatoes

from slips

Just like the humble potato, sweet potatoes are grown for their underground tubers. I love this vegetable (*Ipomoea batatas*) as it is so versatile and a great alternative to traditional potatoes. This isn't a crop you can grow on the windowsill; they will need room outside or in a greenhouse.

Because sweet potatoes originate from warm climates they will need a long growing season, so get them started in early spring to give them enough time to develop tubers underground for harvesting later in the year. They are grown from "slips", which are basically a bit like softwood cuttings from a plant. Start the process of encouraging the sweet potatoes to develop slips as early as possible in spring to ensure they have time to produce tubers before the autumn frosts.

You will need

- + Container such as a grape punnet
- + Peat-free, general-purpose compost
- + Sweet potato
- + Knife

Fringe benefit

One bonus of growing sweet potatoes is that their leaves and shoots can also be harvested and cooked, a bit like spinach. However, please do not do this with ordinary white potatoes, as their leaves are poisonous!



Sweet potatoes are pretty large, so will need growing space outside.

Sweet potatoes are pretty large, so will need growing space outside.

how to grow



01 Fill a container with compost and make sure it has drainage holes. Wash your sweet potato. Don't bury it, but nestle it horizontally into the compost so the lowest third is covered.



02 Place the container in a sunny position indoors. After a couple of weeks you will see shoots emerging from around the base of the sweet potato. These shoots are your slips.



03 When the slips are 10cm (4in) tall they can be carefully removed from the original sweet potato with a knife. Put each slip into a jar of water and continue to grow them on your windowsill, ensuring they are kept warm.



04 Once the risk of late spring frosts is over, plant slips outside in containers or directly into the soil. If you have a greenhouse, plant them there; protection from autumn frosts gives maximum chance of producing tubers.



05 These are trailing plants, so give them plenty of space to sprawl. To save space you can train them up bamboo wigwams or a trellis.



06 Sweet potatoes will be ready at the end of summer or early autumn. Harvest the tubers in the same way you would traditional potatoes by uprooting the plant and digging around in the compost.

Let it thrive

Sweet potatoes are more tender than their distant cousin, the potato, so they need protection from frosts. In really cold areas you will need to grow them under a cover (such as a fleece or cloche)

during spring and early autumn; if you live somewhere that rarely gets frosts you can grow them outside without a cover. They will be fine in pots and raised beds and could be grown on balconies, roof gardens, and even a porch if they receive plenty of sunlight.

Hack.08

Sweetcorn

from corn on the cob

If you love throwing a fresh cob on the barbecue in summer, then consider this hack. Corn on the cob appear in stores throughout summer, and drying the kernels is the easiest way to grow your own sweetcorn at home. Save a cob each year to dry for seeds to use the following season, and you'll have homegrown sweetcorn for ever! And you can use this method for popcorn, too.

Leave your supermarket cobs to dry out naturally until the individual kernels (which contain the seeds) turn hard, making them suitable for sowing. Once the kernels are dry and hard they can be removed. I find the easiest way to do this is to hold the cob over a bowl and rub my thumb over them so that they ping off and into the container below. You'll end up with hundreds of kernels, but unless you are a maize farmer you only need to collect a small handful. Pop the dried kernels into an envelope and store in a cool dark place until the following spring.

You will need

- + Dried corn kernels
- + Small plant pots or toilet roll tubes (optional)
- + Peat-free, general-purpose compost



how to grow



01 Sow kernels indoors into individual pots or toilet roll tubes using peat-free compost at 2.5cm (1in) deep, a few weeks before the risk of frost is over.



02 Transplant outside when the seedlings are 10cm (4in) high. Sweetcorn should be planted in a grid, not single rows, to allow for better pollination rates.



03 Sow kernels directly into the soil outside in a weed-free area.
Plant or sow seeds 40cm (16in) apart.



04 Sow two seeds in each “square” of the grid to allow for one failing to germinate. Remove the weaker one later if they both start to grow.



05 Your delicious, succulent corns on the cob should be ready from midsummer onwards. Enjoy!

Let it thrive

Sweetcorn plants are slightly tender, so if you live in a cool-climate country you need to wait until the risk of frost is over before planting them outside. Germination takes a few weeks, so it's best to

sow about three weeks before the risk of frost is over in your area. Sweetcorn can get quite large (2m/6½ft high), so you will need a garden with, ideally, enough space for at least nine plants to ensure good pollination. They are wind pollinated and therefore need a bit of a breeze.

Pop your own corn

Popcorn is closely related to sweetcorn and it can be grown in almost exactly the same way from the packets of popcorn kernels you buy to pop in a pan at home. The plants will produce very similar-looking cobs to sweetcorn, but they are far starchier and wouldn't taste particularly good if you try to eat them! Instead, harvest and dry the kernels and fry them in oil to make popcorn (or use them in a popcorn-making machine). Don't grow both sweetcorn and popcorn in the same garden, as they will cross-pollinate. This could mean that you end up with popcorn that won't pop and sweetcorn that isn't very sweet!

Hack.09

Leeks

from the base

Supermarket leeks (*Allium porrum*) can be grown from the scraps that you would otherwise throw away. The ones I've grown taste just as good as those I've bought from a shop. You can grow your leeks directly in the ground if you have a garden, or you can keep them on a windowsill and harvest them when you are next having a roast.

If you like the idea of growing food at home then leeks are a must, because they are one of the few vegetables tough enough to hang around outside when it gets cold. Leeks are hardy, so they can stay out in the ground during winter until you are ready to harvest them. They require a long growing season, so if you wish to enjoy these vegetables over autumn and winter, which is the traditional time to harvest them, you will need to start growing them in spring.

You will need

- + Leek
- + Sharp knife
- + Jar or saucer
- + Plant pot
- + Peat-free, general-purpose compost
- + Dibber or trowel (optional)



how to grow



01 Remove the base of a leek with a knife, leaving a stub of about 2cm ($\frac{3}{4}$ in). Use the remainder of the vegetable to cook with.



02 Place the leek into 1cm ($\frac{1}{2}$ in) depth of water in a jar and leave on a sunny windowsill. Top up the water so there is always 1cm ($\frac{1}{2}$ in).



03 Soon your leek will start to produce roots and the stem will shoot upwards. When the mini leek has reached 10cm (4in) it can be planted into compost, at the same depth as it was in the water. Keep in a sunny spot.



04 If you intend on growing leeks outdoors in the soil then use a large dibber or trowel to create a hole that is about 5cm (2in) deep and 3cm (1¼in) wide.



05 Place a leek into the hole and use a watering can to gently “wash” the soil back around it. Once established, continue to water regularly.

Let it thrive

The reason for filling the planting hole by “washing” the soil in is that the looseness of the surrounding soil will allow the stem of the leek to thicken easily without too much resistance from firmer soil. In

addition, planting the leek a bit deeper will ensure that the emerging stem of the leek is white and succulent, just like the ones you buy in the supermarket. Exposure to sunlight causes the plant to produce greener stems.

Leeks for dried flowers

Leeks are herbaceous perennials, although most gardeners grow them as an annual. If you leave the leek in the ground, it should produce more stems next season. My top tip, however, is to allow the leeks to go to flower as they have huge seedheads that you can dry and use indoors as an impressive dried-flower display. You can of course collect seeds from the flowerheads and sow more leeks the following year.

Hack.10

Salad leaves

from carrot tops

Carrots are of course grown for their earthy flavoured roots, but leafy green carrot tops are also edible and taste similar to parsley. To grow your own leaves at home, you need to buy carrots in the bunch with their leafy tops still attached.

I've found the best time to get started growing carrot tops for salad leaves is in spring, when they can be planted directly outside if you have room. If you are doing this in autumn, I find it best to plant them indoors in pots and keep them in a sunny position. If they are kept warm they should overwinter and continue to produce foliage the following spring. It is unlikely that your planted tops will produce another root below ground. That said, some followers on my social media accounts have commented that they have managed to encourage carrot tops to produce further edible roots. So it's worth giving it a go.

You will need

- + Three carrots
- + Sharp knife and scissors
- + Pot with drainage holes
- + Peat-free, general-purpose compost



how to grow



01 Cut the tops off the carrots, keeping about 2cm ($\frac{3}{4}$ in) attached to the leafy foliage. Trim the foliage back to about 1cm ($\frac{1}{2}$ in).



02 Fill a pot or container with peat-free, general-purpose compost and plant the carrots with their tops just level with the surface. Grow them on your windowsill or outside during summer.



03 In a few days you will see the new foliage starting to emerge from the tops of the carrots.



04 If growing in a pot outside, plant with the tops of the carrots level with the surface, and place the container in full sun.



05 When the leaves are about 10cm (4in) high they can be harvested and used instead of parsley in recipes. The carrots should continue to produce additional flushes of foliage throughout the summer.

Let it thrive

You can also plant carrots directly into soil outside in spring or summer. Carrots require a light soil and might rot if you plant them in

a heavy clay soil. If your soil is clay, then it is best to grow them in containers.

Beet it

This method also works with beetroot – the foliage makes delicate salad leaves. You'll need to buy beetroot in a bunch. Remove the leaves (use them in cooking), leaving about 1cm ($\frac{1}{2}$ in) of the stalks attached. Slice 3cm ($1\frac{1}{4}$ in) off the top of the beetroot. Plant this slice in peat-free, general-purpose compost with the top just level with the surface. Grow on a windowsill or outside during summer.



Hack.11

Red cabbage

from the base

Red cabbage is one of the most colourful vegetables in the grocery aisle. If your homegrown cabbage looks purple and not red, it is because the colour can vary depending on the pH of the soil it grows in. In acidic soil (low pH) the leaves are usually redder and in more neutral and alkaline soils (high pH) the leaves tend to become more purple.

Cabbages are quite hungry plants, so add plenty of organic matter such as garden compost or manure to the soil prior to planting outdoors. If you are planting your cabbage indoors in a pot, then feed once or twice a week while it is growing with a balanced, liquid plant feed. Towards the end of the season, you can leave the cabbage to flower and set seeds. These seeds can be harvested and sown the following spring, and those seedlings will form into a tight red ball like the original cabbage. Red cabbages are annuals, so you can dig them up (or pull them up if in a container) and add them to your compost heap at the end of the season.

You will need

- + Red cabbage
- + Sharp knife
- + Shallow dish
- + Plant pot
- + Peat-free, general-purpose compost



You should get a few successive flushes of growth from spring into autumn.

You should get a few successive flushes of growth from spring into autumn.

how to grow



01 Cut off the base of the red cabbage, leaving a stub of about 2cm ($\frac{3}{4}$ in). Put it in a dish or jar with a 1cm ($\frac{1}{2}$ in) depth of water and place on a sunny windowsill.



02 Change the water every few days; fresh water helps encourage rooting. After one or two weeks you will see new leaves starting to emerge from the base.

From the Veg Aisle | **RED CABBAGE FROM THE BASE**



03 The cabbage can now be planted in peat-free compost and kept on the windowsill.



04 Alternatively, plant outside, about 1cm ($\frac{1}{2}$ in) below the soil. If you are planting more than one, space the cabbages 30cm (12in) apart.

Let it thrive

Keep the plant watered during dry periods. The cabbage won't form into a solid ball like the original plant, but instead will give you leaves, and should continue to produce fresh leaves after harvesting. Keep picking to ensure it keeps supplying you with fresh cabbage leaves throughout summer and into autumn.

Brassica bonus

This same method of propagating a plant from its base can be followed with other members of the cabbage family, or brassicas, including pak choi (or bok choy), Savoy cabbages, kale, and Chinese leaf. I have managed to root a broccoli stem as well, although that was harder to do. I have also used the same method for growing all types of lettuce from the supermarket.

Hack.12

Squash

and pumpkins from seed

Squash are one of the most popular autumn veg, and if you collect the seed you can grow your own the following year and never buy one again. Of course, many of us buy a pumpkin every year for carving at Halloween. You can use the same method to grow your own.

Squash are easy to grow from the seeds you can scoop out from the inside. They are annual climbing or trailing plants, so you will need to sow each year in order to produce fruits in autumn. Growing a squash has two parts: in autumn, collecting and storing the seeds for over half a year, and then in late spring sowing and growing the seeds. If you are growing a pumpkin, you will almost certainly purchase it in autumn as this is when they are available for sale.

You will need

- + Squash or pumpkin
- + Sharp knife
- + Sieve
- + Kitchen paper
- + 9cm (3½in) plant pots
- + Peat-free, general-purpose compost

Grow as microgreens

Squash plants are large and sprawling, so you will need an outdoor space if you want to grow them. However, it is possible to grow the seed as microgreens at any time of the year. Simply scatter a few seeds over a seed tray filled with peat-free, general-purpose compost and leave on a sunny windowsill. After a couple of weeks, they will produce shoots and leaves that can be picked and added to salads.



how to grow



01 Cut the squash in half – or slice off the top if you are carving a pumpkin for Halloween – and scoop out some of the seeds.



02 Place them in a sieve and give them a rinse to remove as much of the pulp as possible. Leave them to dry on kitchen paper for a few hours.



03 Put the dry seeds in an envelope, label them, and store somewhere cool and dry until mid-spring, when they can be sown for planting out in late spring or early summer.



04 Sow one seed per 9cm (3½in) pot in peat-free, general-purpose compost. Squash and pumpkin seeds are best planted on their edge 2–3cm (¾–1¼in) below the surface. Otherwise, water collects on their broad surface and they have a tendency to rot.



05 Once the seedlings are 10cm (4in) high they can be planted outside in fertile soil (see [box](#)). They take up a lot of room, so if you are planting several give them plenty of space apart from each other.



06 Squash can be trained up trellis, fencing, and walls by tying in the shoots with string. You may need to provide extra support for the swelling fruit if they get very heavy.

Let it thrive

Squash and pumpkins are tender plants, so don't plant out your seedlings until the risk of frost is over. This is usually late spring or early summer. They like a rich and fertile soil; add plenty of organic matter to the area prior to planting. Site individual plants at least 1m (3ft) apart, and ideally even further. They will sprawl on the ground, but you can train them onto a trellis to save space. If you want especially large pumpkins for Halloween, then remove some of the emerging pumpkins and allow just two or three to form on the plant. Give the plants a liquid feed every week (a standard tomato feed is good) around the root area, starting when the flowers appear through to late summer. As autumn approaches, you can place a paving slab under the heavy fruit so that it doesn't start to rot on the soil before you are ready to harvest.

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from the
Herbs Aisle

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Hack.13

Mint

from cuttings

This traditional garden herb (*Mentha x piperita*) is loved for its fresh-tasting leaves and can easily be grown from the sprigs in a supermarket packet. Buy the freshest available, with the longest best-before date.

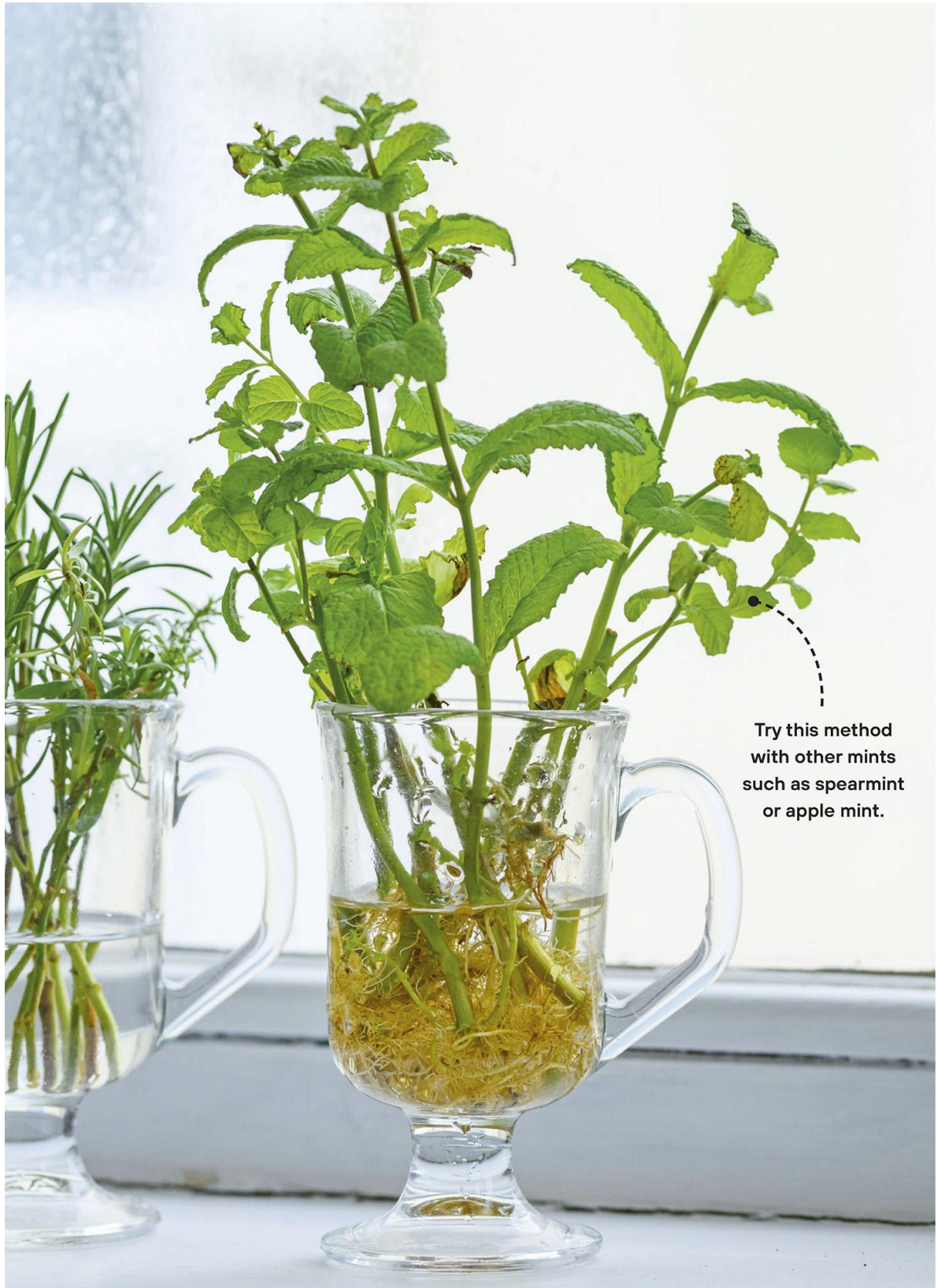
While peppermint is ubiquitous, there are many different flavours belonging to the mint family. In my own garden I grow ginger mint, strawberry mint, chocolate mint, and even banana mint.

The great news is that mint is very easy to grow. The not-so-good news is that mint is almost too easy to grow! If you aren't careful, it can take over your entire garden as it sends out its underground rhizomes: vigorous root-like stems that will grow through the soil and send out new shoots. For this reason, always grow mint in a container or pot and never plant it directly into the soil. Unlike many of the other culinary herbs, which generally prefer dry, arid conditions, mint isn't as fussy and is quite happy in moderately moist soil, so don't forget to water the plant regularly during the summer.

You will need

- + Fresh mint stems
- + Sharp knife
- + Glass or jar
- + 9cm (3½in) plant pots
- + Peat-free, general-purpose compost

+ Pots of increasing sizes



Try this method
with other mints
such as spearmint
or apple mint.

Try this method with other mints such as spearmint or apple mint.

how to grow



01 Remove the lowest two-thirds of the foliage along the stem. You can do this simply by running the stem between your thumb and index finger. Save the leaves for cooking later.



02 Use a knife to trim the end of the stem, cutting just below a node (bud or bumpy part of the stem).



03 Place these cut stems of mint into a glass or jar, ensuring the bottom 2cm ($\frac{3}{4}$ in) of the stems is covered with water.



04 Place the jar of water on a sunny windowsill and refresh the water every few days. Roots should appear at the bottom of the stems after two or three weeks.



05 Plant individual stems into 9cm (3½in) pots in peat-free, general-purpose compost. Keep on your windowsill or on the patio outside.



06 Pot plants up into larger containers as they get bigger. After two or three years you can remove the plant from the pot, divide the roots into smaller clumps, and plant these in more pots.

Let it thrive

Keep an eye on your mint plants to check that they haven't spread. I've seen mint plants in pots that have been plunged into borders and yet have still managed to spread out of drainage holes or sending shoots over the top of the pot and rooting in the surrounding soil. When grown in

pots, mint can be shortlived, so I suggest taking cuttings regularly and repeating the process above to keep a regular supply of mint.

Hack.14

Chilli

or bell pepper from seed

Chillies and their milder relatives, the bell peppers, are easy to germinate from their seeds and they reliably produce colourful and spicy fruits each year in my garden. Although there are hundreds of amazing chilli varieties, only a few types appear in the supermarket. I like to visit farmers' markets and farm shops in summer to find rare or unusual chillies I can propagate from.

Chillies require a fairly long growing season, so seeds should be sown in late winter or early spring. If you have a greenhouse or will be growing them indoors then I suggest you can start sowing as early as January to make the most of the extra frost protection under glass. If you plan on growing chillies outside in containers or directly in the soil during summer, then wait until March until you sow, because otherwise the plants will be ready too early and they won't be able to face the cold. You can use the same technique for bell peppers. Select red bell peppers as they generally have riper seeds. This isn't always the case with chillies, which come in a range of colours: red doesn't always denote ripeness.

You will need

- + Sharp knife
- + Fresh chilli or red bell pepper
- + Kitchen paper
- + Seed tray
- + Peat-free, general-purpose compost

- + Plastic bag or propagator (see [How to make a propagator](#))
- + 9cm (3½in) plant pots

Perennial delights

Chillies are usually grown by gardeners as annual plants and discarded after they've finished cropping in early autumn. However, they are technically perennial and if you bring your plant indoors before the autumn frosts arrive, you can expect more delicious chilli peppers the following year.



Chillies picked early will be milder than those left to ripen longer in the sun.

how to grow



01 Use a sharp knife to halve the chilli or pepper. You can wear gloves to protect your skin. Scoop out some of the small white seeds and place them on kitchen paper for an hour to dry.



02 Fill a seed tray with peat-free, general-purpose compost. Sprinkle the seeds evenly over the surface of the compost, leaving about 1cm ($\frac{1}{2}$ in) between each one.



03 Cover with another 1cm ($\frac{1}{2}$ in) of compost. Place in a heated propagator in a light or sunny room.



04 If you don't have a propagator, cover the tray with a plastic bag and leave in a warm, sunny position indoors. Seeds germinate quite quickly – they should emerge after about 10 days.



05 If you are intending to grow them outside eventually, the seedlings can be pricked out individually and placed into 9cm (3½in) pots when they have reached 10–12cm (4–5in) high.



06 Keep these on a sunny windowsill and when the risk of frost is over they can be planted outside, spaced 40cm (16in) apart.

Let it thrive

Choose a sheltered spot in full sun. Chillies can also be planted into individual 10–12 litre (18–21 pint) pots, or plant three in a growbag. In a greenhouse or on a windowsill, plant directly into 10–

12 litre (18–21 pint) pots when you thin out the seedlings. Taller chillies or peppers may need staking when laden with fruit. Chillies are tender plants so make sure you have picked all those grown outside before it starts to turn cold, to avoid frost damage.

Storage

Chillies are best eaten fresh, but they can be left in the sun to dry for use at a later date. You can also freeze them. Once defrosted they lose some of their shape, but retain their heat and flavour and can be added to any dish that you want to spice up. I was surprised this year to defrost some Trinidad Scorpion, Carolina Reapers, and Chocolate Habaneros that had been in the freezer for two years, and I was still able to germinate their seed.

Hack.15

Garlic

from a clove

Garlic cloves can be planted in the garden or in pots and will each produce an entire garlic bulb for you to enjoy. Despite its association with Mediterranean recipes, garlic is Asian in origin, possibly from southwest Siberia. This means that garlic is extremely hardy, so you can even plant it out in autumn and winter, as long as there isn't snow and ice on the ground.

Garlic is sold as bulbs in the supermarket herb section. Each bulb is made up of the individual cloves that we're all familiar with. If you stick one of these cloves in water or in soil or compost, it will propagate itself, produce new roots and shoots, and become a new plant. It's amazing and so easy to do. Each clove that you plant should form into a large bulb containing loads more cloves. It's an easy way to multiply the number of cloves you have. And if you store some of the cloves somewhere dark and cool after harvesting them, you can plant them out the following season. You may never need to buy garlic ever again. As they refer to it on social media, it is a garlic infinity glitch – an endless supply of garlic.

You will need

- + Garlic bulb
- + Small jar of water

+ Cocktail sticks (optional)



how to grow



01 Select a healthy-looking bulb with cloves that feel hard or firm. Fill a small jar with water and rest the entire garlic bulb on top, making sure the base of the bulb is above the water. If there is an excessive amount of the papery, white skin then remove it, but otherwise it can stay.



02 If the bulb is too small to rest on top of the jar, carefully push two cocktail sticks into opposite sides of the bulb and rest the sticks on the jar instead so the garlic is hovering above the water. Leave the jar on a warm, sunny windowsill.



03 After about 10 days you will notice roots emerging from the base of the bulb and shoots from the top.



04 Remove the bulb from the water and break into individual cloves.



05 Plant the cloves in a large pot or directly in the soil (see [box](#)); either way, space them 12cm (5in) apart. Make sure that the top of each clove is 2cm ($\frac{3}{4}$ in) below the surface of the soil.



06 If you are growing garlic in pots, water occasionally during dry spells. Don't overdo it, because the swelling bulbs can be prone to rot in damp conditions.

Let it thrive

Your garlic cloves need a warm, sunny position in the garden to thrive and fully develop into a large bulb. Garlic also needs a light soil, so if your garden is on clay you might want to consider growing it in containers. Garlic is ready to harvest from mid- to late summer when the stems start to turn yellowish-brown and flop over.

Carefully pull them up. Each original clove should have formed a new bulb of garlic. Occasionally the original clove won't have formed an entire bulb, but will instead have swollen and become much larger than when it was planted. This large clove is still fine to cook with. After harvesting, garlic bulbs will benefit from being left in the sun for a few days to cure and help develop the flavour. If you ended up with lots of bulbs you can plait the stems together and hang them somewhere cool and dry.

Hack.16

Lemongrass

from a stem

If you love Asian food, and particularly Thai cuisine, then lemongrass is an essential crop. Not only does it add a zesty, citrusy flavour to dishes, but it is also a real looker. I love its upright, chunky stems and its bluish-green, fountain-like foliage. It's an "edimental", both edible and ornamental.

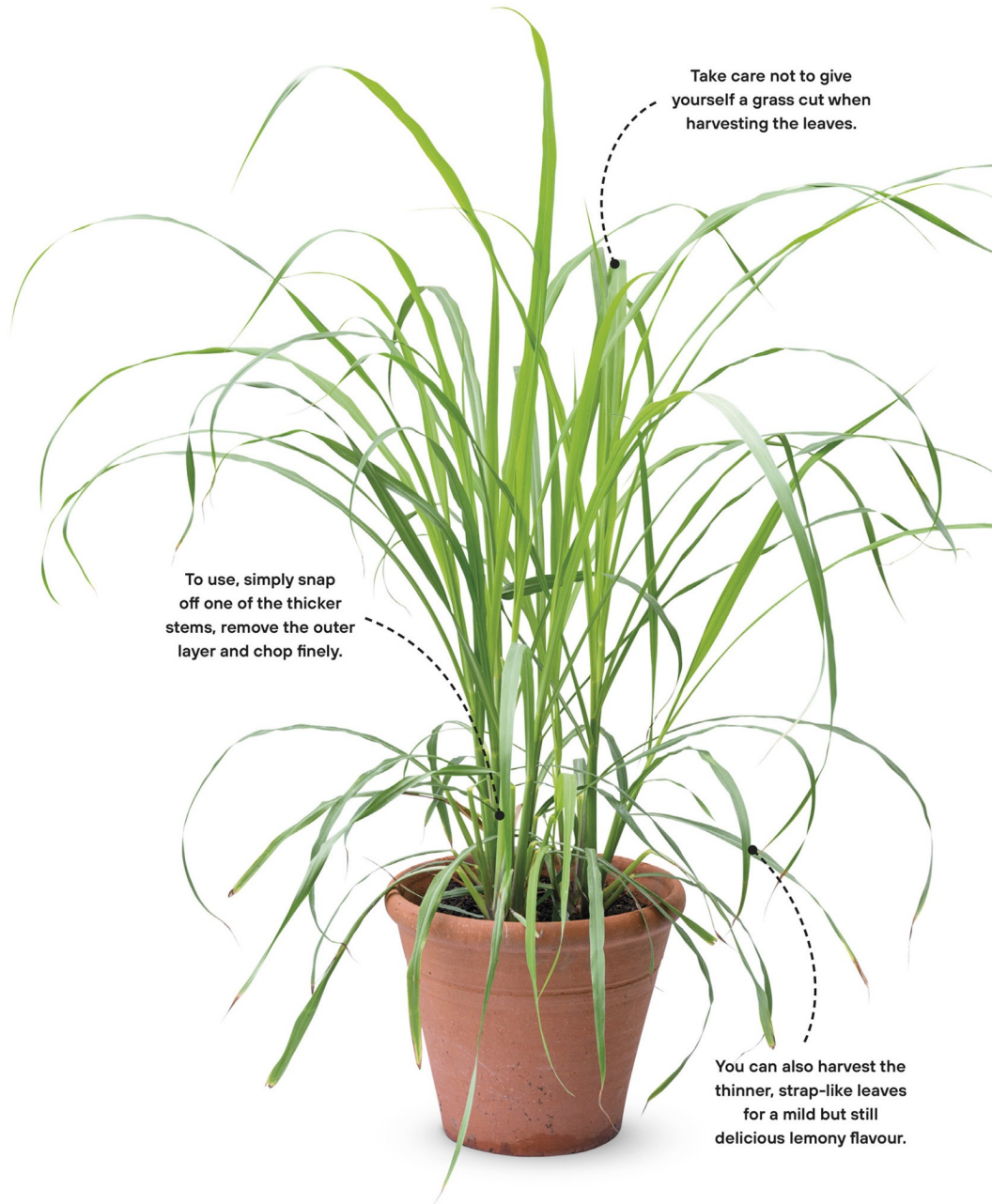
Often sold in packets containing a few stems that are about 15–20cm (6–8in) long, lemongrass from the supermarket is easy to grow, especially if you live in a warm climate. But don't be put off growing it if you live in a cooler area, such as I do in England. Lemongrass requires a tropical climate to grow outside all year round, but you too can grow it all year long if you keep it in a pot and bring it inside during the colder months, when it will make a beautiful houseplant for a sunny kitchen windowsill.

You will need

- + Glass and dark tape
- + Lemongrass stem
- + 9cm (3½in) plant pots
- + Peat-free, general-purpose compost

Know your plants

The botanical name of lemongrass is *Cymbopogon citratus* and it originates from coastal Southeast Asia, although it is now grown in tropical areas around the world. The plant is a tender perennial grass, meaning it keeps growing year after year, but cannot survive outside in low temperatures; below 10°C (50°F) plants are liable to die.



Take care not to give yourself a grass cut when harvesting the leaves.

To use, simply snap off one of the thicker stems, remove the outer layer and chop finely.

You can also harvest the thinner, strap-like leaves for a mild but still delicious lemony flavour.

how to grow



01 Wrap dark tape, such as duct tape, or black paper around your glass. The lemongrass stems prefer a dark environment, which encourages root formation.



02 Place the base of a stem in about 1cm ($\frac{1}{2}$ in) depth of water in your glass and leave in a sunny spot for two weeks. Change the water a few times to replenish the oxygen supply, which helps to promote root growth.



03 You will notice the tip of the stem starts to extend upwards and you may also observe roots forming around the base, although this doesn't always happen immediately.



04 At this stage, pot your lemongrass stem into peat-free, general-purpose compost, making sure the part that was in water is now in the compost.



05 Keep your lemongrass nice and warm in a sunny location and enjoy watching it grow. Water about once a week, depending on temperatures: more frequently in periods of hot weather.

Let it thrive

Keep the surface of the compost free from weeds to prevent them competing with the lemongrass. They won't require much watering in

winter, but give the plants a drink once a week during the summer growing season. They might also benefit from a general-purpose liquid feed every couple of weeks. Read the instructions on the label before applying.

Hack.17

Ginger

from roots

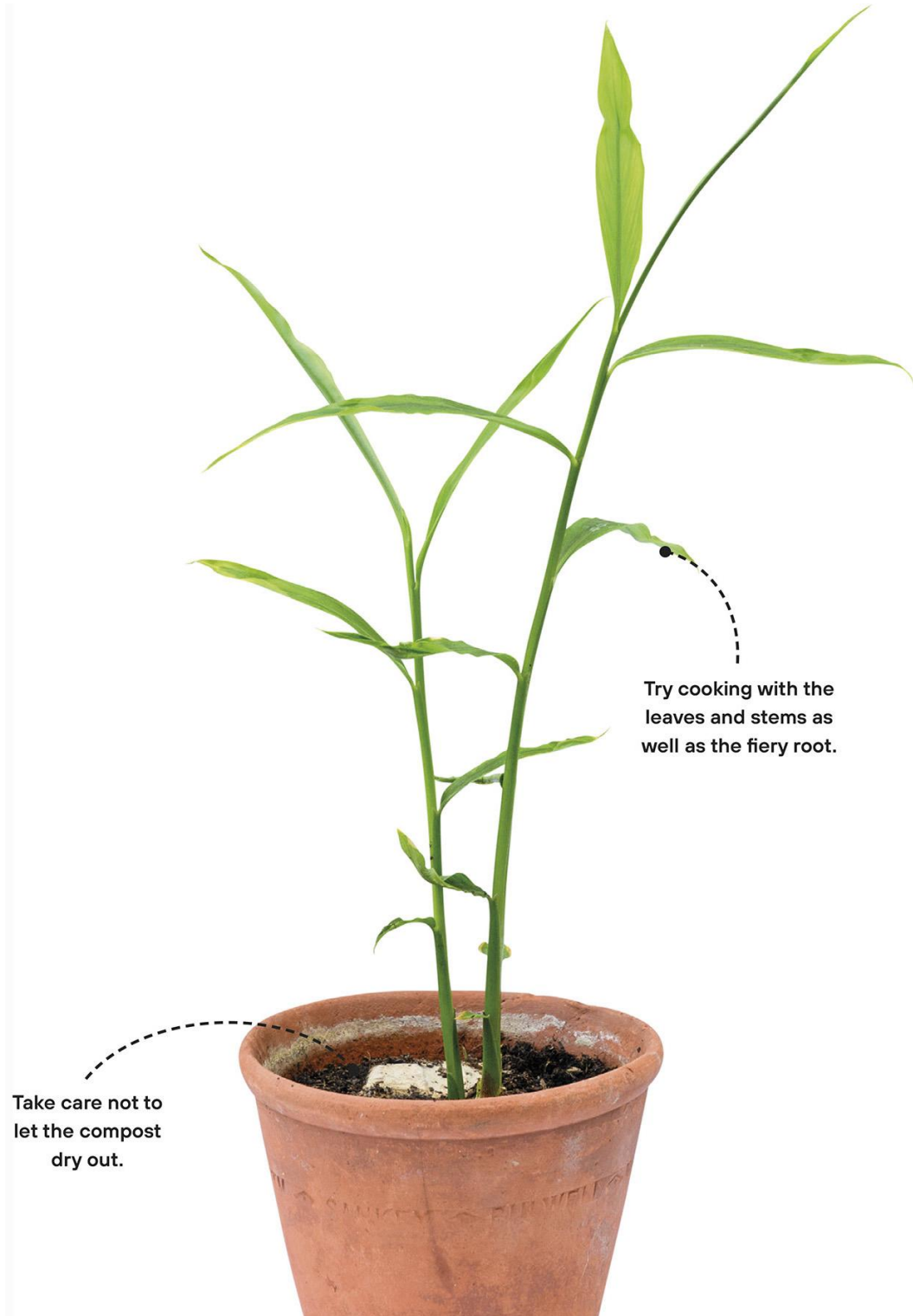
Ginger is one of the most flavoursome ingredients you can grow at home. Not only does its chunky roots provide you with a punchy, spicy, and exotic flavour, but they make attractive houseplants too. They are perennial plants, so will keep cropping for as long as you look after them. If you give the plant occasional tender loving care, you may never need to buy ginger again.

The ginger plant is grown from the underground rhizome, which is basically a fancy name for its swollen, underground roots. It is this spicy-flavoured rhizome that is usually used in cooking, although their long leaves and stems can be chopped up and added to dishes too. Look for the plumpest and freshest fresh ginger you can. If you look carefully, you will see that some of the rhizomes have small bulges or knobbly bits just below the surface. These are the sections of rhizomes that you want as they are the dormant buds, which will sprout into a plant for you.

You will need

- + Sharp knife
- + Fresh ginger
- + Small plant pot or seed tray

- + Peat-free, general-purpose compost
- + Perlite (optional)
- + Larger pots, for growing on (optional)





Try cooking with the leaves and stems as well as the fiery root.

Take care not to let the compost dry out.

how to grow



01 Using a sharp knife, carefully cut your ginger rhizomes into sections 3–5cm (1¼–2in) long.



02 Fill a pot or seed tray two-thirds full of peat-free, general-purpose compost. Perlite can be added to increase drainage, but it isn't essential.



03 Lay individual sections of rhizome on the surface of the compost in each pot. If any rhizome section has small, knobbly lumps just below the surface, make sure they are pointing upwards.



04 Cover the rhizomes with compost to just below the top of the pot. Leave somewhere warm to encourage the rhizomes to send out roots. Regularly check the compost and if it feels dry to the touch then give it a drink.



05 It usually takes a year for the ginger to produce rhizomes for harvesting. Remove the plant from its pot and pull off a section of root to use in the kitchen. Then replant the ginger, adding more compost if necessary.

Let it thrive

Ginger plants come from Southeast Asia so are suited to tropical climates. They are tender and won't cope with frosts or cold. If you

live in a cool-climate country such as the UK, you will need to grow your ginger indoors in a warm, sunny spot. You can put the pot outside in a sunny spot during summer. Just don't forget to bring it back indoors before the temperatures take a dip in late summer.

Try turmeric

If you have success with ginger, then give turmeric a try. Like ginger, it is grown from the rhizome (root) using exactly the same technique. Not all supermarkets sell fresh turmeric, but many health food shops supply it. Look for the plumpest, freshest rhizomes. Turmeric is also a perennial, although the foliage dies back during the winter. Keep the plant indoors between early autumn and late spring.



Hack.18

Coriander

by dividing a pot

If you love Asian food, then coriander is definitely a herb worth trying to grow. It is packed full of spicy and aromatic flavours. Whether you grow it for the bitter yet floral seeds or the zesty yet parsley- or celery-like stems and foliage, it is an ingredient worth including in every garden.

Buying a pot of coriander is the horticultural bargain of a lifetime. You are getting hundreds of plants for the price of one, because there are usually hundreds of potential seedlings in there. The garden nurseries who supply pots of coriander to supermarkets find it easiest to fill a small pot with compost and sprinkle seeds over the surface. Once all those seeds have germinated it provides the shopper with what looks like a bushy coriander plant, but is in reality many tiny coriander seedlings clumped together. The downside is that it isn't possible for hundreds of seedlings to survive long in such a tiny pot.

To overcome this problem, you can separate them and grow them on by “division”, which means splitting or separating the root ball of the plants into smaller sections.

You will need

- + A living pot of coriander
- + Four to six plant pots
- + Peat-free, general-purpose compost



The distinctive taste of
coriander leaves is essential
in many Asian dishes.

Keep well watered to
avoid the plant setting
seed too early.

The distinctive taste of coriander leaves is essential in many Asian dishes.

Keep well watered to avoid the plant setting seed too early.

how to grow



01 Remove the whole coriander plant from its pot.



02 Use your fingers and thumb to carefully prise sections apart, keeping the roots as intact as possible. You should end up with four to six sections of coriander, each with roots.



03 Place each section of coriander in its own pot. Top up with compost around the edges and firm in.



04 Leave on a sunny windowsill and keep watering (see [box](#)). You can also plant it outside in spring after the risk of frost is over. Find a warm, sunny location in well-drained soil.

Herbs to divide

Have a go at dividing these herbs too, which you can often find in a pot at the supermarket: mint, parsley, tarragon, and thyme.

What's in a name?

Coriander is often called Chinese parsley, as the flavour of the leaves and stems is reminiscent of that herb. In the UK, we generally call both the edible leaves and shoots as well as the seeds “coriander”. In America the foliage is called cilantro, and the seeds are referred to as coriander.

Let it thrive

Coriander plants are annuals, meaning they will only live for one year before producing seeds and then dying. In hot, dry conditions they can “bolt”, meaning that they grow too quickly, causing the plant to go to seed rapidly and surviving for even less than one year. If you keep the plants well watered they should survive for the majority of the summer. Keep trimming the shoots and leaves, as this will encourage more growth. If you want to collect seeds, stop trimming the plants and allow them to flower instead; the flowers will eventually turn to seed. You can either use the seeds in cooking or save them and sow again in spring for another crop the following summer.

Once you have harvested the seed, the plants can be pulled out and added to the compost heap or, if they are growing outside, left to die back in the soil. Chances are that the seeds that fall from the dead plant will germinate in the soil the following spring.

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from the
Fruit Aisle

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Hack.19

Strawberries

from fresh seed

Strawberries are the taste of summer – and the plants are tiny, meaning that if you have any outdoor space you can grow them, from hanging baskets to tubs on the patio. Their trailing foliage and white flowers are beautiful in spring.

Strawberries are usually divided into two types. Larger-fruiting strawberries fruit during early summer, typically in June. Then there are the “everbearing” types, which are usually smaller and crop periodically throughout summer and into autumn. Most of the strawberries in supermarkets are June-fruiting types. Technically, a strawberry isn’t a fruit, as the seed isn’t contained within its flesh. Instead, the tiny, grainy black or green specks on the skin are the seeds. Not all seedlings come true from seed, so the strawberry fruit that you produce may differ from the original. Some may not ever produce fruit, but the majority will – and it’s worth trying, as it’s good fun and will with luck supply you with masses of strawberries each summer for years to come.

You will need

- + Strawberries
- + Sharp knife
- + Kitchen paper and plate

- + Seed tray
- + Peat-free, general-purpose compost
- + Propagator (optional, see [How to make a propagator](#))
- + 9cm (3½cm) pots

Why is a strawberry called a strawberry?

Possibly because straw is placed under the berries as they ripen to stop them rotting on the ground. Another theory is that they were called straeberries or stray berries, referring to their “runners” or adventitious shoots, which “stray” from the plant to try to reproduce.



If you're lucky you'll grow an "everbearing", long-fruited strawberry plant.

Strawberries have trailing foliage and look great in hanging baskets.

If you're lucky you'll grow an "everbearing", long-fruited strawberry plant.

Strawberries have trailing foliage and look great in hanging baskets.

how to grow



01 Slice thin slivers off the strawberries. Lay them out on kitchen paper on a plate.



02 Leave to dry for 48 hours, then use your finger to gently rub the fruit slivers. The tiny dark seeds should detach from the dried skin. Tip the seeds onto damp kitchen paper.



03 Half-fill a seed tray with peat-free, general-purpose compost. Put the kitchen paper with strawberry seeds on top and cover with another 1cm ($\frac{1}{2}$ in) of compost.



04 Keep the seeds indoors on a sunny windowsill and water every few days. Be patient – the seeds can take a long time to germinate. One batch of mine took over two months. (You can also use a propagator, see [How to make a propagator.](#))



05 Once seedlings appear they can be pricked out and potted on into individual 9cm (3½in) pots to allow the plants to grow and develop.



06 In spring, the strawberry plants can be planted directly into the soil, 30cm (12in) apart, or into hanging baskets and containers.

Let it thrive

Strawberries need to be grown in a sunny position. When they start to produce fruit, it's important to place straw or other natural soft material under the berries to stop them rotting on the ground. Birds

love the fruit almost as much as humans so you may need to think of some protection to keep them away when the fruit is ripe. One technique is to paint stones red and place them near the plants before the fruit ripens. Birds are attracted to the stones, but once they realize that they aren't edible they turn their attention elsewhere and don't take an interest when the strawberries finally ripen and turn red.

Hack.20

Lemon tree

from a pip

Create a touch of the Italian coast on your patio or in your conservatory with this attractive citrus plant that can supply you with lemons for your G&T or lemonade. As a bonus, its flowers are beautifully perfumed.

You will need to be patient with this project. Lemon trees can take a number of years before they bear any fruit when grown from a pip. And as they are seedlings, there is a small chance that they might never produce anything. For this reason, I suggest sowing a few pips to increase your chances. It is great fun to grow lemon trees, and even if you don't get any lemons, they are beautiful evergreen plants to have in your house and garden. I've found that while the majority of lemons from the supermarket contain pips, some don't have any. Generally the larger the lemons are, the more likely they are to contain some.

You will need

- + Lemon with pips
- + Sharp knife
- + 9cm (3½in) plant pots
- + Peat-free, general-purpose compost
- + Recycled clear plastic bags
- + Propagator (optional, see [How to make a propagator](#))
- + Pots of increasing sizes
- + Citrus compost (optional)



Limes, oranges, clementines, tangerines, satsumas, and most other citrus fruits can be grown from pips in exactly the same way as lemons, although finding limes with pips is difficult.

These small green fruits will ripen to yellow, providing they get plenty of sun.

Limes, oranges, clementines, tangerines, satsumas, and most other citrus fruits can be grown from pips in exactly the same way as lemons, although finding limes with pips is difficult.

These small green fruits will ripen to yellow, providing they get plenty of sun.

how to grow



01 Cut open the lemon and remove the small white pips. Soak the pips in water for 24 hours to soften the outer shell.



02 Peel back the outer shell to reveal the smaller seed inside. If you find this too fiddly, simply plant the pip with the white outer shell; it will just take slightly longer to germinate.



03 Fill a 9cm (3½in) pot with peat-free, general-purpose compost and push the seed 2cm (¾in) below the surface. Place a clear plastic bag over the pot to increase humidity and retain heat.



04 Place on a sunny windowsill. In winter, you may need to place it in a propagator or on a shelf above a radiator. In a few weeks your seedling will emerge. Remove the plastic bag.



05 When it is about 12cm (5in) high you can plant it into a slightly larger pot. It is also worth changing from general-purpose to a potting or specialized citrus compost, which will suit the lemon's needs.

Let it thrive

Lemon trees are slightly tender (vulnerable to cold), and mature plants are best kept in pots so that they can be brought inside during

winter months, unless your garden is very sheltered and frost-free. Nor do they like fluctuations in temperature, so when you move them indoors before it gets cold, keep them away from radiators and warm vents or they will start to drop their leaves. Feed them once a month between spring and autumn with a specialized citrus feed.

Know your plants

Lemons originate from the Mediterranean, and are in fact evergreen shrubs: woody plants smaller than trees, which don't drop leaves over winter. Lemon plants produce small, white, fragrant flowers, which, once pollinated, will turn into the juicy, yellow fruits. Their botanical name is *Citrus x limon* – that “x” in the middle means that the lemons we grow today are the result of two different wild citrus plants cross-pollinating, a very long time ago.

Hack.21

Plums

from a stone

The season for plums is from mid- to late summer, when you can usually find these juicy fruits in stores. Plums grow on medium-sized trees, so if you want to have a go at this project, then you may need some space in your garden. However, you can restrict their size by growing them in containers on the patio.

Most of us think of plums as purple-reddish, egg-shaped fruits, but there are hundreds of varieties. They vary in size enormously, and come in colours including white, green, blue, yellow, gold, and black. Do bear in mind that you are in for the long haul here – it can take several years for a plum to produce fruit from a seedling. Furthermore, because seedlings often vary from their parent, there is no guarantee of fruit. But it is great fun growing plum seedlings – they are one of my favourite fruits and, you never know, you may create an exciting new variety by sowing plum stones. Plums will benefit from other plum trees growing nearby to increase pollination, although a few can be self-fertile. Grow a few seedlings if you have room.

You will need

- + Sharp knife
- + Fresh plums
- + Hammer
- + 9cm (3½in) plant pots

+ Peat-free, general-purpose compost



how to grow



01 Use a knife to cut each plum in half and remove the stone. The seed is inside the stone, so carefully crack the outer shell of the stone with a hammer and remove the seed.



02 If this is too fiddly, you can keep the stone intact, although germination will be much slower as the seed has to break out of the stone.



03 Fill a 9cm (3½in) pot with peat-free compost to just below the top. Use your finger to push the seed into the compost so that it is 2cm (¾in) below the surface. Brush back compost into the hole so the seed is completely covered.



04 Put the pot outside and water regularly. Plum seeds need a cold spell to germinate (this is called stratification), so keep them outside in the cold during winter.



05 In spring your seedlings should emerge. Keep them watered throughout spring and summer, and by early autumn the seedlings should be

ready for planting outside in the soil, or moving into larger containers.

Let it thrive

Plums need a warm, sheltered and sunny spot to grow in. They can be grown as a free-standing tree, but because they flower early in the season, their blossom can be susceptible to spring frosts. For this reason, it is worth planting them against a south- or south-west-facing wall to provide extra warmth and frost protection. Unlike many other fruit trees, plums aren't keen on being pruned. It's best to do this only when the canopy is over-congested, or to remove crossing, damaged, or diseased branches. Pruning should only be done when the tree is actively growing, between spring and late summer. Pruning at other times can make it susceptible to a few diseases.

Keep it in the family

Plums belong to the Prunus or cherry family, and you can use this technique for other members of the family. You could also try growing cherries, apricots, peaches, nectarines, damsons, bullaces, greengages, and almonds. Peaches and nectarines will require a warm, frost-free site.

Hack.22

Apples

from a pip

There are over 2,500 varieties of apples, yet sadly we only find a handful in the supermarket. However, by taking pips from some of these well-known names you could create your own delicious variety. Some of the tastiest apples in the world started life as seedlings. If the name includes “seedling”, such as Bramley Seedling, or “pippin”, such as Cox’s Orange Pippin, then it almost certainly means they started off their lives as random seedlings.

Apples thrive in cool-climate countries such as England. They are hardy trees and will tolerate frosts and lots of rain, making them ideal candidates for growing in the garden. Commercially bought apple trees are usually grown on “dwarfing” rootstocks to reduce their size. Your seedlings will therefore grow much bigger than the trees you see in many gardens. However, apple trees are suitable for growing in containers, which will restrain their growth. Apple trees can take a few years to produce a crop, and like many fruit seedlings, the ones you grow won’t necessarily be the same as the tree you took the pips from. Some may not even fruit at all, so sow a few pips to avoid disappointment. If they haven’t fruited after five

years, discard them and make room for other seedlings. You can also use this method to grow pears and Asian pears.

You will need

- + Apples
- + Sharp knife
- + Kitchen paper and freezer bag
- + 9cm (3½in) plant pots, plus larger sizes
- + Peat-free, general-purpose compost



You can grow your seedling in a large container to keep it a manageable size.

When your apple is established, prune so plenty of sun can ripen the fruit.

You can grow your seedling in a large container to keep it a manageable size.

When your apple is established, prune so plenty of sun can ripen the fruit.

how to grow



01 Cut an apple from stalk to tail and remove the pips (seeds) from the central core. Discard any pale or white pips, as these haven't ripened and probably won't germinate. You want the dark brown, almost black pips.



02 Wrap the seeds in damp kitchen paper and place in a ziplock freezer bag. Put them in a dark cupboard for a few weeks; no need for watering, as the bag will retain moisture.



03 After a few weeks, remove the seeds from the kitchen paper. The seeds will have germinated and grown little tails. Fill a 9cm (3½in) plant pot with compost.



04 Use a dibber or stick to make three or four holes in the compost, about 2cm ($\frac{3}{4}$ in) deep, and equally spaced. Carefully place a seed in each one, and cover with more compost.



05 In spring your apple seedlings should germinate. When the seedlings have reached about 10cm (4in) high they can be potted on individually into larger pots.



06 In autumn the apple trees can either be planted in the soil outside (although they will get big) or planted into larger outdoor containers, which will restrict their size.

Let it thrive

Apple trees do best in a sunny location in well-drained soil. They are usually grown as open-centre or goblet-shaped trees, with a short

trunk and then four or five fruiting branches as their main framework spanning outwards. Apple trees benefit from being pruned once a year in winter. Aim to remove branches growing into the centre of the tree and remove congested canopies so that there is about a hand's width between each branch. This will ensure that sunlight reaches the remaining branches, which will help the fruit ripen.

Hack.23

Raspberries

from fresh seed

I remember walking into the mess room at the RHS Wisley gardens when I first started working there as a gardener in the fruit department. It was a hot summer's day and there were masses of punnets of just-picked raspberries on the table, ready to go to the shop. The aroma was amazing, and the scent of this fruit is still my all-time favourite.

Of course it isn't just the aroma that we love about raspberries. It is that sweet yet sharp flavour combination that is so magical. I love the way it can be added to desserts such as chocolate roulade or a fruit pavlova, where the acidity of the berries cuts through the sweetness of the other flavours. Yet the best way to enjoy raspberries (in my opinion) is to eat them fresh with just a dollop of crème fraîche on top. Raspberries are closely related to blackberries (brambles), and most of us know how readily they spread. This makes propagating raspberries quite easy. I use fresh raspberries from the supermarket, but I have heard that you can also use frozen ones too. I must try it one day.

You will need

- + Raspberries
- + Sieve
- + Spoon

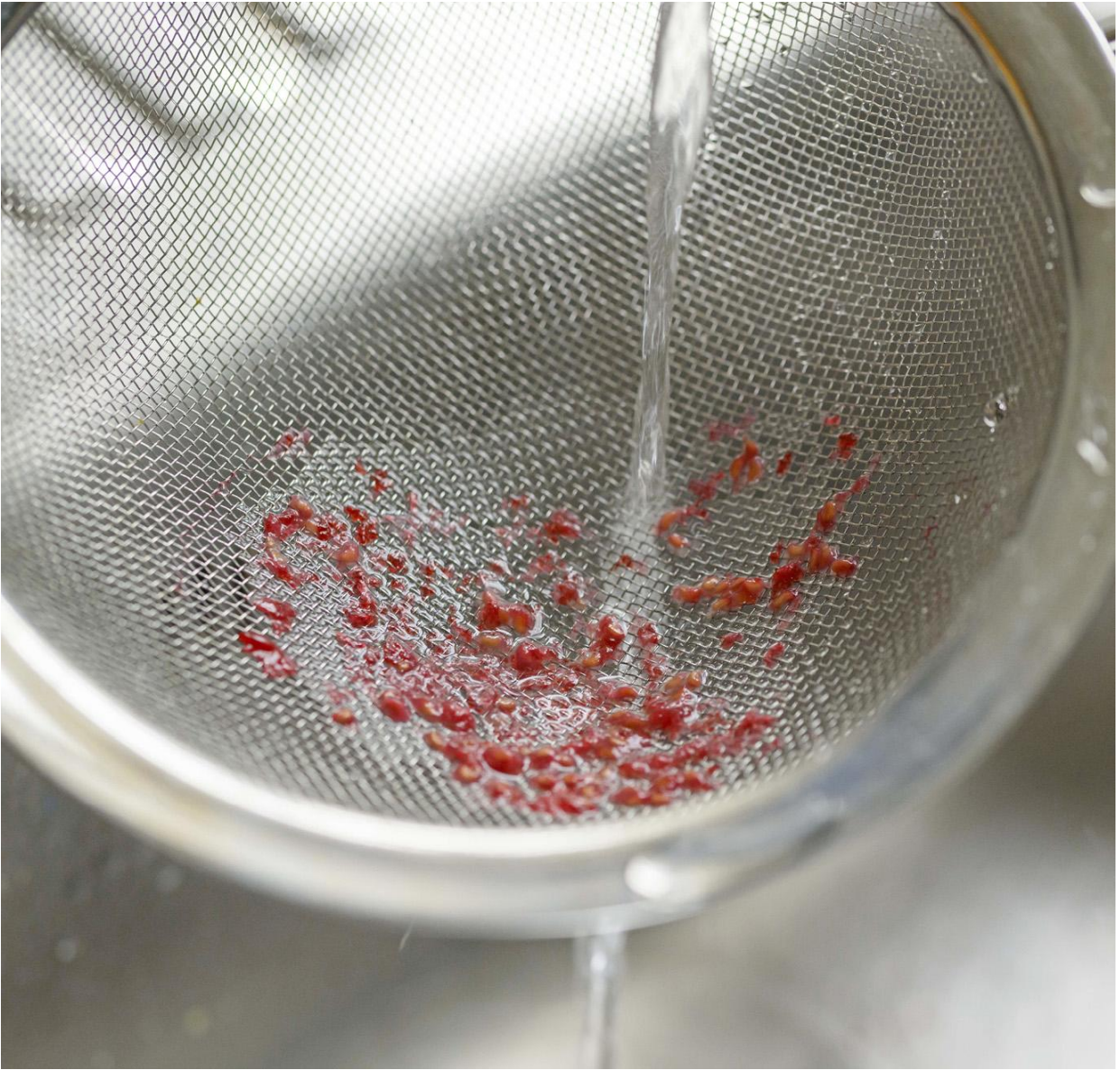
- + Plate
- + Kitchen paper
- + Seed tray
- + Peat-free, general-purpose compost
- + 9cm (3½in) plant pots



how to grow



01 Place a handful of raspberries into a thin-meshed sieve and use the back of a spoon to crush the fruit and remove the tiny seeds by pushing the pulp to one side.



02 Rinsing under water can also help separate pulp and seeds. Once you've done your best to do this, scrape the seeds from the sieve with the spoon and leave them on a plate to dry.



03 Spread the seeds on kitchen paper, like jam on toast, and leave to dry for a few days. Fill a seed tray with peat-free compost and place the kitchen paper on top.



04 Cover the seeds with another 1cm ($\frac{1}{2}$ in) layer of peat-free compost. Leave on a warm, sunny windowsill. After a few weeks your raspberry seedlings should emerge.



05 Pot them into individual 9cm (3½in) pots filled with peat-free compost. Raspberries are hardy, so can be planted out at any time of year. Once they have reached 15cm (6in) they are ready for planting in the garden.

Let it thrive

Raspberry plants produce fruits on “canes”, which look a bit like brambles. They will need a support system to keep them propped up. I plant my raspberries 20cm (8in) apart in rows. There are two different types of raspberries; summer and autumn fruiting. The easiest way to tell which one you have is to look at where the plant is producing fruit. If it produces raspberries on canes formed in the previous year it is an autumn type. If it produces berries on the canes formed on the current year’s new growth, then it is the summer type. The time when they crop can also be an indicator, although this is not always accurate. Prune autumn-fruiting canes down to the ground each March to encourage new canes to grow. For summer-fruiting raspberries, cut away the older fruiting canes after they have cropped (mid- to late summer) and keep the new canes produced that year, to produce fruit next year. I hope you’re following this!

Other berries to try

Use this method for any “hybrid” raspberry such as blackberries, huckleberries, tayberries, Japanese wineberries, and loganberries.

Hack.24

Pineapple

from a cutting

In the eighteenth century, rare and expensive pineapples were status symbols, and stone or marble replicas adorned many prestigious gateways. It showed the world that you were wealthy enough to grow pineapples in your grounds or import them from abroad. These days you don't need a team of gardeners and a pineapple pit – just a windowsill and a supermarket.

Pineapples are tender plants and you will need to grow them inside. They make gorgeous, leafy-looking houseplants, and if you are fortunate they may even reward you with fruit. Pineapples are grown by taking a cutting of the fruit's leafy growth from the top of the fruit, and I'm not aware of any other supermarket crops that can be propagated in this way. I have had varying success with pineapples; some thrived and some rotted in the water. Next time you treat yourself to a pineapple, give this a go.

You will need

- + Pineapple
- + Sharp knife
- + Plant pots of varying sizes
- + Peat-free potting compost



how to grow



01 Choose a pineapple with a green, healthy-looking top. Avoid any with brown tips to the foliage or withered leaves. Carefully twist the leafy tops and pull.



02 The whole top should come away with a small amount of flesh. Otherwise, cut the top with a knife, including about 1cm ($\frac{1}{2}$ in) of the fruit.



03 Leave to dry for 24–48 hours. Peel back some of the lower leaves to reveal more of the base. I usually remove about three layers.



04 Place some compost in a small plant pot, then the pineapple. Add compost to just below the top of the pot. Use your fingers to firm the compost in around the pineapple.



05 Once roots have appeared you can pot your plant up into peat-free potting compost in a 3 litre (5 pint) pot. Keep on a sunny, warm windowsill and water every few days (see [box](#)).

Let it thrive

Keep your pineapple plant inside in a warm, sunny position. It requires temperatures of 18–30°C (64–86°F), so it can be moved

outside in its pot during summer. Just don't forget to move it back in when the temperatures dip. The best way to water a pineapple is by pouring water down the centre of the leaves at the top of the stem.

Gravity will ensure that the water reaches the necessary parts.

Pineapples belong to the bromeliad family, and the rosette of top leaves is how they funnel water down to other parts when it rains. If you are lucky enough to see the pineapple start producing a fruit, then you can add a general-purpose liquid feed for houseplants in the watering can (follow instructions on the label) and feed every couple of weeks.

Hack.25

Blueberries

from seed

Their delicious flavour aside, one of my favourite reasons for growing blueberries is their spectacular autumn colour. Forget your expensive Japanese maples at this time of year (although I do love them): blueberry, for me, is one of the best shrubs for autumn colour, with foliage that can offer a riot of purples, yellows, oranges, and reds.

Blueberries grow as deciduous shrubs that reach about 1.5m (5ft) in height. They do require an acidic soil, like the conditions that you would grow rhododendrons and camellias in. If you don't have soil with a low pH in your garden, you can grow them in containers or raised beds. You will need to use ericaceous compost, which is formulated specifically to suit plants that prefer acidic soil. It can take a few years for blueberries to produce fruit. They benefit from other nearby blueberries to increase pollination, and therefore increase fruit yields, so it's worth planting a few blueberry seedlings.

You will need

- + Blueberries
- + Kitchen paper
- + Spoon

- + Sieve (optional)
- + Seed tray
- + Peat-free, ericaceous compost
- + 9cm (3½in) plant pots
- + Rainwater (not tap water)



Once established,
you'll get amazing
autumn colour from
your blueberry leaves.

Plant a few pots so
your blueberries
have increased
opportunities to
pollinate.

Once established, you'll get amazing autumn colour from your blueberry leaves.

Plant a few pots so your blueberries have increased opportunities to pollinate.

how to grow



01 Place a handful of blueberries on kitchen paper and use the back of a spoon to squash them. You want to separate the tiny seeds from the flesh.



02 You can also put the squashed fruit in a sieve and run it under the tap to wash away some of the flesh. Leave the seeds on kitchen paper to dry out for 24 hours.



03 Fill a seed tray with peat-free ericaceous compost to just below the top.



04 Put your kitchen paper and seeds on top, and cover with another 1cm ($\frac{1}{2}$ in) of compost. Leave outside; blueberries need a cold winter to enable the seeds to germinate.



05 Seeds should germinate in spring. Once the seedlings reach about 10cm (4in) they can be potted individually into larger containers. Blueberries can be planted into their final growing position in autumn.

Let it thrive

Blueberries prefer slightly moist conditions, so keep the plants well watered during dry periods. Use rainwater (from a water butt, or leave watering cans or buckets outside during rainy periods). Tap water can have a high pH (alkaline), particularly in limestone and chalk areas. Rainwater has a lower pH and is more suitable for blueberries' acidic requirements. Prune blueberries in early spring just as the buds start to appear. This helps you identify if any branches have died. Remove about one-fifth of the growth. Remove older stems near ground level with a pair of loppers, leaving younger and new shoots to develop and produce the fruit. Note, although blueberries need cold to break the dormancy of the seeds (and start to germinate), if the supermarket cold-stored them, this might not be necessary.

Try cranberries

Cranberries can also be grown using this technique. They have the same acidic soil and compost requirements as blueberries but need even more moisture, as their natural habitat is boggy conditions. Cranberries are much more low-growing than blueberries and have an attractive trailing habit. I've got one cranberry plant at home, in a hanging basket. I keep it slightly in the shade, so that it doesn't dry out too quickly in summer, but have to keep it regularly topped up with rainwater.

Hack.26

Passion fruits

from seed

Passion fruits have exquisitely intricate flowers. Many of us are familiar with the purple and white-flowered varieties in our gardens. The autumn fruits produced from these hardy varieties are barely edible, but are closely related to the tropical species that produce the delicious fruits you buy from the supermarket.

Passion flowers (*Passiflora*) are a group of perennial climbers which, as well as stunningly intricate flowers, also have attractive, deeply lobed foliage. They originate from some of the warmer regions of the Americas and many are tender, including the edible fruiting types found at the supermarket. For this reason you will have to grow your seedlings indoors, or at least under glass if you have a conservatory or greenhouse. You will therefore need enough space indoors for a large container and something for their tendrils to grip and scramble up.

You will need

- + One passion fruit
- + Sharp knife
- + Sieve
- + Kitchen paper and spoon
- + Seed tray with lid

- + Peat-free, general-purpose compost
- + 9cm (3½in) plant pots
- + Peat-free potting compost
- + Large container (at least 5 litres/9 pints)



how to grow



01 Cut the passion fruit in half with a knife. Scoop out the hard black seeds. Rinse them in a sieve to remove some of the flesh.



02 Leave the seeds on kitchen paper to dry for a few hours. Fill a seed tray (I use a lidded fruit punnet) with peat-free compost to just below the surface.



03 Push three or four seeds into the compost to a depth of 2cm ($\frac{3}{4}$ in), using your finger. Fill the holes with more compost, and then water.



04 Close the lid and leave on a sunny windowsill and water every few days. After a few weeks your seedlings will emerge.



05 Pot the seedlings on into individual 9cm (3½in) pots. When they reach about 15cm (6in) high, they can be potted on into their final growing

position; this should be a large (5 litres/9 pints at least) container full of peat-free potting compost.

Let it thrive

Passion fruits are evergreen climbing plants so they will need a trellis, or support system made of strings or wires, to scramble up. Flowers and fruits should appear after two or three years if you keep the growing conditions warm and light; you could be rewarded with a small crop of passion fruits in autumn. Passion flower plants may need tying in as they grow, although they do have tendrils to help them climb. Occasionally you may need to trim or prune shoots to tidy them up and remove any surplus growth. Keep the plants well watered during hot sunny spells and occasionally give the plants a liquid feed, such as tomato feed, every few weeks in summer. Tomato feed is high in potassium and should help your passion fruit produce flowers.

Hack.27

Mango

from a stone

Mango are tropical fruits that grow on large evergreen trees. Unless you are lucky enough to live in a warm area with no risk of frosts, you will need to grow a mango plant in a pot indoors.

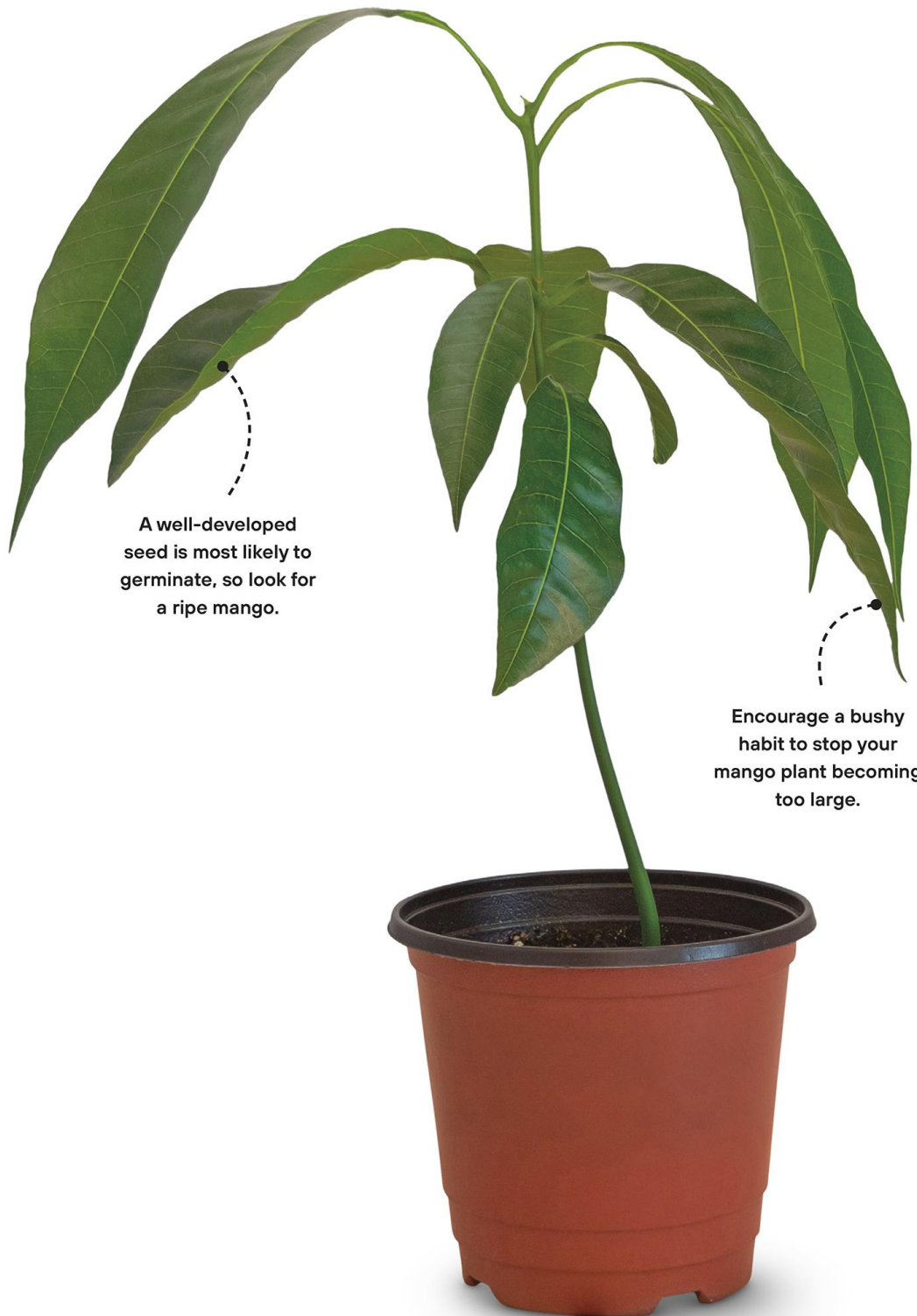
Look for the ripest mangoes you can find in the supermarket. This usually means those with the reddest skin, although some varieties have a naturally greener colour. If you gently press your finger into the surface and it feels soft, that is an indication it is ripe. The ripest mangoes will have the most developed seed, which is most likely to germinate and develop into a mango plant. I grow my mango tree in my conservatory. It is yet to produce fruit, as it is only two years old, but I'm hoping in a couple more years it may produce a crop.

You will need

- + One ripe mango
- + Sharp knife
- + Kitchen paper
- + Butter knife
- + Freezer bag or plastic box
- + Peat-free, general-purpose compost
- + 9cm (3½in) plant pot

+ Peat-free potting compost

+ Large container (at least 5 litres/9 pints)



A well-developed seed is most likely to germinate, so look for a ripe mango.

Encourage a bushy habit to stop your mango plant becoming too large.

A well-developed seed is most likely to germinate, so look for a ripe mango.

Encourage a bushy habit to stop your mango plant becoming too large.

how to grow



01 Cut the mango flesh carefully from around the large, flat stone. Give the stone a rinse and rub to remove as much pulp as you can. Then leave it to dry on some kitchen paper for a few days.



02 Remove the seed from the stone. Carefully insert a sturdy butter knife (don't use a sharp knife in case you stab your hand) – there is usually an access point on the inside edge in the middle of the stone.



03 Twist and lever the two halves of the stone. Eventually they will come apart and you are left with the large kidney-shaped seed. Take care not to damage the seed.



04 Place the seed into a freezer bag, spray a bit of water in, and leave it somewhere warm and dark. After a few weeks, it will have germinated and sent out a sprout.



05 Remove the mango seed from the bag and push it into peat-free, general-purpose compost in a pot so that it is about 3cm (1¼in) below the surface. Fill in the hole you have made with more compost.



06 Leave on a bright, sunny windowsill. Once the plant has reached about 10cm (4in) high it should be potted up into a larger container. Keep potting it into larger containers as it grows.

Let it thrive

Mangoes are tender, so should be kept indoors between early autumn and late spring. However, if it is manageable in size, the

mango plant can be moved outside to the patio for some of the warmer months. Otherwise, keep it in a well-lit, warm room, but avoid too much direct sunlight, which can scorch the leaves through the windows. To prevent the mango from growing too tall and becoming a tree, pinch out the growing bud after a year or two. This will encourage the plant to branch outwards and create a bushier, more manageable habit for growing inside. Keep the plant regularly watered and occasionally give the tree a liquid feed.

Hack.28

Kiwis

from seed

Growing a kiwi fruit from the supermarket will always hold a special place in my heart. It was my first viral post, which received over 32 million views. To be fair, it was mainly due to people from New Zealand commenting about the fact I should have said kiwi fruit, because a kiwi is a bird. I do apologize to them, as I wasn't suggesting we cut birds in half! In the UK, the term kiwi does mean the fruit.

A kiwi (*Actinidia chinensis* or *A. deliciosa*) plant is a deciduous, climbing plant originating from China. The plants are surprisingly hardy and can be grown outside in most cool-climate countries such as the UK. Kiwis can be either male or female, so to make sure that you get a plant that will fruit (female), it is best to grow a few kiwis together to ensure their flowers are pollinated and they produce a crop.

You will need

- + One kiwi
- + Sharp knife
- + Teaspoon
- + Kitchen paper
- + Seed tray
- + Peat-free, general-purpose compost

+ 9cm (3½in) plant pots



how to grow



01 Cut a kiwi in half. Inside you will see loads of tiny black seeds. Scoop the seeds out with a teaspoon.



02 Leave the seeds on kitchen paper to dry for 48 hours.



03 Fill a seed tray with peat-free, general-purpose compost and sprinkle the seeds over the surface as evenly as you can. Lightly brush the seeds into the compost with your hand. Leave the seed tray in a warm location indoors. Soon you will see lots of tiny seedlings emerging from the compost.



04 When they have produced their true leaves (the second set, after their first pair of leaves) you can carefully prick the seedlings out and pot them on into their own 9cm (3½in) pots. Grow them on until the seedlings reach about 20cm (8in) high. They can then be planted directly into the soil or larger pots outside. Don't forget that you will need a few plants for pollination, and each plant in a pot will need a climbing structure.

Let it thrive

Plant kiwi plants about 50cm (20in) apart and allow them to grow and intertwine with each other. This should help encourage good pollination between male and female plants. In the garden, I find it best to grow them against a wall or fence where they can scramble vertically. Alternatively, you could bang in two upright posts and stretch parallel rows of horizontal wires between them. Kiwis produce fruit very late in the season, so try to harvest them before the frosts get to them and damage them. You can bring them indoors and ripen them on your kitchen windowsill if they aren't quite ready and are being slow to mature. You can prune the kiwis occasionally to remove congested canopies. Cut the new shoots back to four or five buds.

Hack.29

Melon

from seed

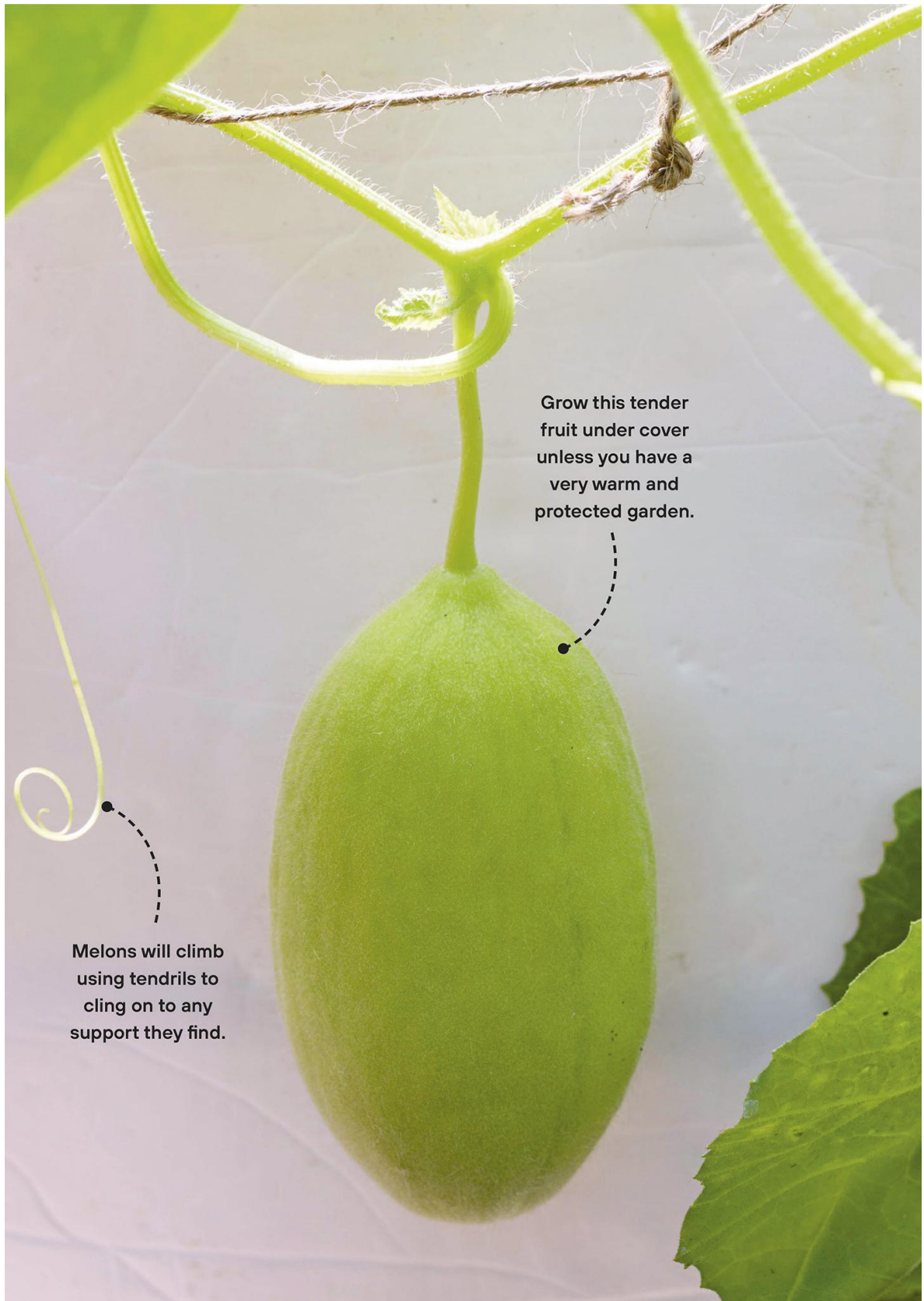
You have two options for supermarket melons. You can either grow them from seed as healthy microgreens to add to salads, or you can grow them as plants that will produce sweet, musky fruits. Select the ripest melon you can find (any variety will do), which should have the most developed seeds. Melons should feel soft but not squidgy to the touch, particularly at the top of the fruit.

Melon plants are tender and grown as annuals in cool climates. In the UK, most of us will be better off planting them in a conservatory or greenhouse. If you are choosing somewhere outside, look for an exceptionally warm, sheltered, south-facing wall or fence to train them on to. If you want to grow melons from seed, the best time to sow seed is April or May so that they are ready to go outside after the risk of frost is over. If growing for microgreens, sow seed at any time, although they make their best growth through the spring and summer. I have sometimes found melon microgreens can taste slightly bitter if the leaves aren't harvested when very young.

You will need

+ One ripe melon

- + Sharp knife
- + Spoon
- + Kitchen paper
- + Seed tray
- + Peat-free, general-purpose compost
- + 9cm (3½in) plant pots



Grow this tender fruit under cover unless you have a very warm and protected garden.

Melons will climb using tendrils to cling on to any support they find.

Grow this tender fruit under cover unless you have a very warm and protected garden.

Melons will climb using tendrils to cling on to any support they find.

how to grow



01 Slice the melon in half, scoop out some of the seeds with a spoon, and give them a rinse to remove any residual fruit flesh.



02 Spread the seeds out on kitchen paper for a few hours to dry.



03 Fill a seed tray with peat-free, general-purpose compost. Sprinkle the seeds over the top, cover with more compost, and leave on a sunny windowsill. Water regularly and soon you will see tiny seedlings emerging. These are your microgreens.



04 If you just want microgreens, trim off the young growth with scissors once they reach 2–3cm ($\frac{3}{4}$ – $1\frac{1}{4}$ in) high and use immediately. They will occasionally regrow, giving you a second or even third flush a few weeks later.



05 If you want to grow melons, leave the seedlings to grow to about 6cm (2½in) and then carefully prick out the best ones. Pot them on individually into 9cm (3½in) pots.



06 Keep them on a sunny windowsill. Once the risk of frost is over, they can be planted outside.

Let it thrive

Melons shouldn't be planted outside until the risk of frosts are over. They can then be potted on into large containers or growbags. You can fit two plants per growbag. Melon plants need a support

structure to climb up and the central stem should be trained up the centre of it, with laterals (side shoots) spread out to either side. When melons ripen they may need something to support their weight, such as a “hammock” made from old mesh bags or even old socks (probably best to wash the socks first!).

Hack.30

Lychees

from stones

These unusual-looking fruits are about the size of a gooseberry with a red, textured outer skin. Inside is edible, soft succulent flesh and a large reddish-brown stone. They are fairly easy to germinate and with a bit of patience and care will eventually reward you with an attractive evergreen tree, suitable for growing indoors or in a greenhouse.

Lychees (*Litchi chinensis*) originate from the warmer regions of southern China and prefer tropical or subtropical conditions. They can grow into large evergreen trees in their natural habitat but their size can be reduced by growing them in pots. Patience is the name of the game when growing a lychee from seed. They are slow growing. I've a two-year-old tree that is still only about 15cm (6in) high, which I keep on my kitchen windowsill. It will probably be a few years before I can expect to get any fruit from it. Good things come to those who wait, apparently, so I'm looking forward to one day being able to harvest my own delicious lychees. Lychees are available from supermarkets for most of the year, usually in a package of about 10 fruits.

You will need

+ Lychees

- + Sharp knife (optional)
- + Jar of water
- + 9cm (3½in) plant pots
- + Peat-free, general-purpose compost
- + Propagator (optional, see [How to make a propagator](#))



The lychee is slow growing, but you can enjoy it as an indoor plant while waiting for fruit to grow.

The lychee is slow growing, but you can enjoy it as an indoor plant while waiting for fruit to grow.

how to grow



01 Peel the red or green outer skin away from the lychees. Despite its rugged appearance, the skin peels easily by hand.



02 The almost rubbery-textured flesh is the fruit. Remove this, using a knife or your nails, to reveal the reddish-brown stone (seed) beneath.



03 Soak the stone in a jar of water for a few hours to soften the surface. This makes germination easier.



04 Fill 9cm (3½in) pots with peat-free, general-purpose compost and sow a stone in each one. Use your finger to push the stone about 1cm (½in) below the surface and then fill in the hole.



05 Leave on a warm, sunny windowsill, or use a propagator if you have one.



06 After a few weeks you should observe your lychee germinating. When it is about 10cm (4in) high it can be removed from its pot and planted in a larger container.

Let them thrive

Keep your lychee indoors for most of the year. During the warmest months you can move it out onto a sunny patio, but don't

forget to bring it back indoors before the temperatures start to drop in late summer or early autumn. Lychees require very little pruning. Just occasionally cut back any wayward branches or if you wish to improve its shape in spring. Lychee trees produce clusters of fruit. Harvest them by removing the entire cluster with secateurs. An indication that they are ripe is that their skin turns red and they start to swell. Unlike many other fruits, lychees will not continue to ripen after they are picked, so it is important to regularly test for ripeness every few days and harvest once they are ready.

Hack.31

Pomegranates

from seed

Despite originating from warm places such as Iran, Iraq, and Northern India, pomegranates are relatively hardy and can be grown outside in milder areas of cool-climate countries. I grow them outside in Devon, England and they produce juicy red fruit about the size of an apple.

Pomegranates (*Punica granatum*) are attractive deciduous shrubs which grow up to about 2m (6½ft) in height, although you can restrict their size by keeping them in a pot. A pomegranate will need a warm location to bear flowers and fruit. In cold areas, they can be grown in conservatories or well-lit indoor spaces. If you aren't sure whether your pomegranate is warm enough outside, then try growing it in a pot and in winter moving it to a sheltered position such as a porch and draping a fleece over it. Pomegranates are packed full of plump ruby seeds, and they seem to propagate very easily. I often end up with lots of seedlings, which I give away to friends.

You will need

- + Ripe pomegranate
- + Sharp knife
- + Kitchen paper
- + Jar of water

+ 9cm (3½in) plant pots

+ Peat-free, general-purpose compost

Did you know?

Despite an apple being depicted in much Renaissance art showing Eve tempting Adam in the garden of Eden, in the original story it was probably a pomegranate. The word pomegranate means “apple with seeds”, from the Latin for apple, pomum, and seeds or grain, granatum, hence the confusion.



how to grow



01 Cut open the pomegranate and remove a few of the red seeds. They are covered with juicy flesh, which needs removing. You can do this by rubbing the seeds with kitchen paper (it can be messy) and then rinsing them. I like to pop them in my mouth and suck the flesh off the seed.



02 Tip the seeds into a jar of water for 24 hours. This softens the outer surface of the seed, encouraging it to germinate more easily.



03 Fill 9cm (3½in) pots with peat-free, general-purpose compost.



04 Push three or four seeds into the compost, 1cm ($\frac{1}{2}$ in) deep.



05 Leave on a sunny windowsill and keep well watered.



06 The seeds should germinate within a month. When they are about 10cm (4in) high they can be carefully pricked out and potted on into individual pots.

Let it thrive

Plant pomegranates directly into the ground. They require well-drained soil and full sun. Alternatively, grow in a large container

indoors. Ensure the plants are kept watered during the summer and keep the surrounding soil or compost free from weeds. Give plants in containers a general-purpose liquid feed in summer when the flowers appear and continue feeding until autumn. Fruits should appear in late summer. Harvest when the surface of the pomegranate feels firm, but gives slightly when pressed. Pomegranates are fairly low-maintenance shrubs and grow reasonably slowly. They don't generally require much pruning, unless there are stray branches to remove or you need to reshape them.

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Hack.32

Camomile

from a teabag

Many herbal teas such as peppermint, sage, lemon balm, rooibos, and even traditional tea (*Camellia sinensis*) are made from leaves, but camomile tea is made from the flowers, and during the commercial drying process many of these flowers turn to seed. Great news if you want to grow your own camomile at home, as there are lots of seeds in just a single teabag.

Camomile is a low-growing perennial with small, daisy-like, fragrant white flowers. There are two types: German camomile, *Matricaria chamomilla*, and Roman camomile, *Chamaemelum nobile*, and the flowers from both can be used to make tea. Most commercial teabags will contain Roman camomile; German camomile is an annual, which means you'll have to sow it each year for a continual supply. While camomile is easy to grow, I must admit I've had varying success with different brands of teabag, and you may therefore want to experiment with a few. Teabags can be sown indoors at any time of year, though they might need a propagator or heat mat if sowing in winter (see [Raising new plants for free](#)), to stimulate germination and growth.

You will need

+ Small plant pot or seed tray

- + Peat-free, general-purpose compost
- + Camomile teabags
- + Vermiculite (optional)
- + Dibber or pencil, for pricking out
- + Larger pots, for growing on (optional)

Try these

Other dried flowers such as rosehip, echinacea, jasmine, lavender and hibiscus can also be used.



how to grow



01 Fill a pot or tray with peat-free, general-purpose compost. Tear open a chamomile teabag and sprinkle the contents over the compost. Lightly brush the tea on the compost surface so that it becomes slightly embedded.



02 You can cover the compost with a thin layer of vermiculite if you have it, to help retain moisture and prevent competition from weeds, but it isn't essential.



03 Water, then leave somewhere warm and sunny such as a kitchen windowsill. The seeds should germinate within 14 days.



04 Once seedlings are about 5cm (2in) high, prick them out. Hold the main stem between your fingers while inserting a pencil or dibber into the compost, and ease out the roots as you gently lift the seedling.



05 Plant seedlings individually into pots indoors or directly into borders, beds, and mini wildflower meadows outside.



06 Flowerheads should appear during the summer. Pick these and allow to dry to make your own fragrant herbal tea. Let a few flowers go to seed so you can collect them and sow again next spring, if you like.

Let it thrive

Keep compost free from weeds to ensure they don't smother the chamomile and steal nutrients. The easiest way to do this is to use a hoe between the plants, taking care not to damage the roots of the chamomile. Rake up the weeds and compost them. Perennial chamomile

can be cut back in early spring to encourage new growth and flowers for the following year. Annual camomile can be pulled up in autumn and resown with seeds the following spring.

Camomile lawn

You can also sow teabags directly outdoors in spring to make a camomile lawn or mini wildflower meadow. Camomile requires well-drained soil, so add a bucketful of grit per square metre and dig it into the top 5cm (2in) of soil. Sprinkle about 10 teabags per square metre over the surface and very lightly rake it in. You may need to protect emerging seedlings from birds.

Hack.33

Lentils

from dried seed

These popular pulses are packed full of protein and are easier to grow than you may think. I've managed to grow large crops in my garden not only as microgreens but also for the actual pods containing the lentils. Drying the lentil crop means you can store them to cook with and have some spare to sow the following spring. Dried lentils can be stored for up to two years.

Lentils can be grown from the dried lentils (*Lens culinaris*) that you can buy from the supermarket. The different types include brown, green, yellow, and Puy. All of these are fine to use for propagation (don't buy the split ones, which won't work). You can grow lentils as microgreens on a windowsill indoors, wherever you live. However, to grow them as fully fledged plants for their pods (which contain the lentils) requires a favourable climate and a sunny, sheltered position. I can grow them outside in South Devon, but in cooler areas you may struggle unless you have a polytunnel or a warm spot indoors. You could try growing them in pots outside and, if the pods haven't developed before the frosts arrive, move them indoors.

You will need

- + Dried lentils (any type except split)
- + Dish or jar of water

- + Sieve
- + Shallow tray with drainage holes
- + Peat-free, general-purpose compost



how to grow



01 Soak a handful of dried lentils in a dish or jar of water overnight.
Drain the lentils in a sieve.



02 Keep the lentils in a jar of water in a light room for a few days. Every other day, drain and rinse the lentils and place back in the jar with fresh water.



03 After a week or so the lentils will sprout. You can either eat them at this point as a healthy snack, or plant them outside individually to produce lentils (see [step 6](#)).



04 Alternatively, fill a shallow container with peat-free, general-purpose compost. Make sure it has drainage holes. Sow your soaked lentils fairly densely on the surface.



05 Leave on a sunny windowsill. After a few days they will start to germinate. Use scissors to harvest the top growth when it is 2–4cm ($\frac{3}{4}$ – $1\frac{1}{2}$ in) high if you want microgreens.



06 If you want to grow them outside for lentils, wait for the seedlings to get to about 10cm (4in). Plant them outside in late spring after the risk of frost is over. Carefully prise the seedlings away from the tray of compost (I use a teaspoon), preserving as much root as possible, and plant them 10cm (4in) apart, in rows 20cm (8in) apart.

Let it thrive

Lentils grow to about 40cm (16in) in height so will probably not need a support structure. If you find they are flopping onto the ground you can push small posts into the ground at the end of each row, and run two rows of parallel string along them at 20cm (8in) and 40cm (16in) in height. Tiny pea pods appear 80–100 days after sowing. Harvest these and remove the lentils from the tiny pods to cook with. Alternatively, you can remove them from the pods and leave them on trays to dry in a warm place indoors. If you're guaranteed a warm and dry late summer you can leave them on the plant in their pods to dry. Lentils are annuals, so you will need to sow seeds each spring.

Hack.34

Peas

from dried seed

One of my favourite crops to eat directly from the garden is fresh peas in their pods. I grow them regularly, propagated from the cheap boxes of dried pea seeds you find in the supermarket. The peas they produce are just as reliable and good as anything I've grown from packets of seeds bought from a garden centre.

Peas (*Pisum sativum*) are climbing annual plants with succulent pulses produced inside the pods. If you want an additional gourmet treat, harvest the young shoots, leaves, and tendrils when they first appear. Peas are reasonably hardy plants and will tolerate fairly cold conditions outside. I start sowing peas in early spring outside, and then sow regularly every two or three weeks afterwards for a succession of harvests from mid-spring through to late summer. Peas don't like to have their roots disturbed once they have germinated, so I've found it best to grow them in toilet roll tubes. The tubes can be planted directly into the ground, without having to remove the seedlings. The cardboard just decomposes. The length of the cardboard tubes also encourages the peas to produce long roots, which they prefer.

You will need

- + Dried peas
- + Jar or bowl of water
- + Sieve
- + Toilet roll tubes

- + Container or tray
- + Peat-free, general-purpose compost



Peas do best with long shoots, which you can encourage with a toilet roll tube.

Peas do best with long shoots, which you can encourage with a toilet roll tube.

how to grow



01 Soak a handful of dried peas for a few hours in a jar of water, then drain in a sieve.



02 Put the toilet roll tubes in a container and fill with peat-free, general-purpose compost.



03 Sow one pea per tube. Push the pea about 1cm ($\frac{1}{2}$ in) into the compost with your finger and fill in with more compost.



04 Keep the cardboard tubes on your windowsill for a few weeks until the seedlings have reached about 12cm (5in) high.



05 Your pea plants are then ready to be planted outside in a sunny position in well-drained soil. Ensure the toilet rolls are entirely buried. If the top of the roll remains above ground it can act as a wick, sucking up the moisture from the roots.



06 Peas are ready when the pods look swollen. Break a pod open; you should see good-sized, fully formed peas. If they look small and misshapen, leave any similar-sized pods on the bush for longer. Pick regularly to encourage the plant to produce more.

Let it thrive

As the season gets warmer, I start to sow peas directly into the soil instead of indoors. I make a shallow trench with a hoe and then sow peas in a zigzag pattern along the row, leaving about 12cm (5in) between each seed. These climbers need support as they grow. You can use twiggy sticks for the pea plants to scramble up; simply stick them into the ground at regular intervals along the row. When the plant has finished producing pods, it can be cut down to ground level. You can leave the roots in the ground if you don't need the space for anything else. Just chop through the ground with a spade. Because they are part of the legume family, peas "fix" nitrogen, a key nutrient for plant growth, in the soil, meaning your soil will be fertile next time you plant another crop in the same place.

Hack.35

Mustard

from the whole spice

There are two very good reasons for growing mustard seeds bought from the supermarket. The first is that they are fast growing and quickly produce spicy, flavoursome leaves that are brilliant for adding a bit of excitement to salads. The other reason is that you can let the pretty yellow flowers go to seed and harvest them to make your own spicy mustard.

Mustard seed is dirt cheap to buy from the spice aisle of the supermarket. If you buy one packet of seeds, you should never have to buy a jar of mustard again! I grow mustard plants in large pots on my patio. You can also sow them directly in the garden – scatter them over cultivated ground and they will quickly grow, flower, and seed in a short period of time. I must warn you that mustard is what I call a “keeper”. Once you’ve got it in your garden, you might never get rid of it again. I love it seeding everywhere, but if you want finely manicured flower borders, you will need to keep an eye on it and try to grab the seed before it drops onto the ground.

You will need

- + Large plant pot with drainage hole (optional)
- + Bits of broken pots (crops, optional)
- + Bricks (optional)
- + Peat-free, general-purpose compost

+ Watering can

+ Dried mustard seeds



how to grow



01 Place crocks or stones in the bottom of the pot to prevent the compost washing away when you water the plants or when it rains. Fill the pot with compost almost to the top.



02 Lightly water the compost using a watering can to provide a moist surface for the seeds to settle on.



03 Tip your mustard seeds into your hand and sprinkle over the compost. Brush over another 1cm ($\frac{1}{2}$ in) of compost and lightly water again.



04 Mustard grows quickly, so you can expect to see shoots appearing after a few days. You can pick a few of the leaves when they appear, for salads, but leave enough for the plant to produce flowers.

Let it thrive

If you are not sowing directly into the ground, place your large pot on bricks in a sunny, sheltered position. The bricks will help water drain out of the bottom of the pot. Keep your mustard plants well watered during dry periods. The flowers will turn to seed, forming thin green seed pods. The mustard seeds are ready when the pods turn from green to brown and take on a papery texture. Pick the seed pods regularly and store them in a box or container. When you've got enough pods to make the job worthwhile (because it is quite slow and fiddly), break them open and collect the tiny black seeds inside. Store them in plastic containers until you are ready to make a batch of mustard. The seeds will last for years, so you can make up just enough mustard as you need it, knowing you can make more with your stored seeds when you run out.

Homegrown wholegrain mustard

Add equal parts of mustard seed, vinegar (I like cider vinegar), and water to a jar. Mix, then leave to settle and partly ferment for about 48 hours. Sieve the mustard seed, saving the liquid for later. Blitz the mustard seed in a food processor. It should take on a lovely yellow colour. Add some of the soaking liquid to give the consistency you require, and blitz again. Spoon your mustard into small spice jars. Mustard can be stored in the fridge for three to six months, and sometimes much longer.

Hack.36

Chia

from seed

Chia is an annual herb related to sage and salvias, and has numerous health benefits. I grow chia seeds to produce microgreens. It's quick and easy and requires next to no space, just a sunny windowsill. Because chia microgreens are so fast growing, you can sow them every few days to give you a continual supply.

Packets of tiny black chia seeds can be found in supermarkets and health food shops. Most people sprinkle the seeds into food and drinks as they are. However, it is far more fun (and just as nutritious apparently) to grow them as microgreens. If you have childhood memories of growing cress on kitchen paper, then this technique will be familiar to you. In mild areas, chia seeds can be sown outside so you can harvest the seeds at the end of the season. I'm able to do this in southern England, but it might not be so easy in cooler regions.

You will need

- + Kitchen paper
- + Plate
- + Chia seeds



This hack is
super-quick for
instant gratification.



Add these nutritious
sprouts to salads and
sandwiches.

This hack is super-quick for instant gratification.

Add these nutritious sprouts to salads and sandwiches.

how to grow



01 Place a sheet of damp kitchen paper on a plate. Sprinkle chia seeds liberally over the paper.



02 Place on a sunny windowsill and add a light splash of water every two or three days.



03 After three days you will notice the seeds starting to germinate. The microgreens are ready for harvesting when they are about 3cm (1¼in) high.



04 Trim off the shoots and new growth using clean scissors and add to your favourite savoury dishes. If you are lucky, the microgreens will regrow after harvesting.

Let it thrive

Chia plants grow to about 1m (3¼ft) high and produce spikes of blue flowers, which will eventually turn to seed. The plants are an attractive addition to the garden, regardless of the benefits of their seeds. If you want to try growing them outdoors you will need about one square metre of well-drained soil in full sun. Cultivate the ground, removing any weeds that might compete with the seedlings when they emerge. Sprinkle a small handful of chia seeds over the area, as equally distributed as you can, and rake them in. Lightly water using a watering can. Harvest the seeds on a dry, sunny day and store them somewhere dry and cool.



Hack.37

Chickpeas

from dried seed

I was able to make my own hummus last year with the plants I grew from dried chickpeas I bought from the supermarket. It was a lovely surprise, as I wasn't sure if they would grow and ripen in my garden. But I had a fairly large crop, and I will now make sure I set aside space to grow them each year.

Chickpeas are annual plants from the legume, or pea and bean, family. You will need to grow them outside somewhere (unless you have a greenhouse or conservatory), as they won't fit on a standard windowsill. As with all pulses, the peas themselves are literally the seeds. Small pods, which carry the peas inside, will appear on the plants. You can harvest the chickpeas when they are still green, but most people like to leave the peas to turn brown so they can be used for hummus.

You will need

- + Dried chickpeas
- + Sieve
- + Kitchen paper
- + 9cm (3½in) plant pots
- + Peat-free, general-purpose compost



how to grow



01 Soak a handful of dried chickpeas for 24 hours. Drain in a sieve and leave to dry on kitchen paper.



02 After a day or two you will notice the seeds are starting to form “tails” (small shoots). This means they have germinated and are ready to be planted.



03 Sow the chickpeas in 9cm (3½in) pots and grow on a sunny windowsill until late spring. Shoots should emerge in 14–21 days. You can keep growing them indoors in containers.



04 Alternatively, once the seedlings are 10cm (4in) high, and the risk of spring frosts has passed, you can prick out and sow the chickpeas directly into the soil in rows, 15cm (6in) apart.

Let it thrive

Chickpeas only grow to about 50cm (20in) high, so don't need support. Keep the area around your chickpeas free of weeds as they

will compete for light, nutrients, and moisture, and water the plants if you experience an exceptionally dry spell during the summer. The chickpeas should be ready between mid- and late summer, depending on when you planted them. If you are expecting a dry summer, then leave the peas on the plant for as long as possible. If it is wet, you may need to harvest the pods, remove the seeds, and spread them on a tray to dry indoors. Dried chickpeas should last for a year or two. Save some sowing again the following year and use the remainder for cooking.

Grow your own hummus recipe

Soak 400g (14oz) dried chickpeas overnight in water. Cook in a saucepan according to the instructions on the packet, until they're soft. Take the pan off the heat. Agitate the chickpeas in the water using a spoon or spatula, which should remove most of the outer skins. You may need to peel the last few by hand. Drain the chickpeas, reserving some of the cooking water. Put them in a food processor with 120g (4oz) tahini, the juice of 2 lemons, and 2 peeled garlic cloves (no need to chop the garlic). Add a pinch of ground cumin, if you like. Blitz the ingredients until the hummus is smooth. If you prefer a slightly thinner texture, add some of the cooking water. The hummus will keep, in a sealed container, for a few days in the fridge.

Hack.38

Sunflowers

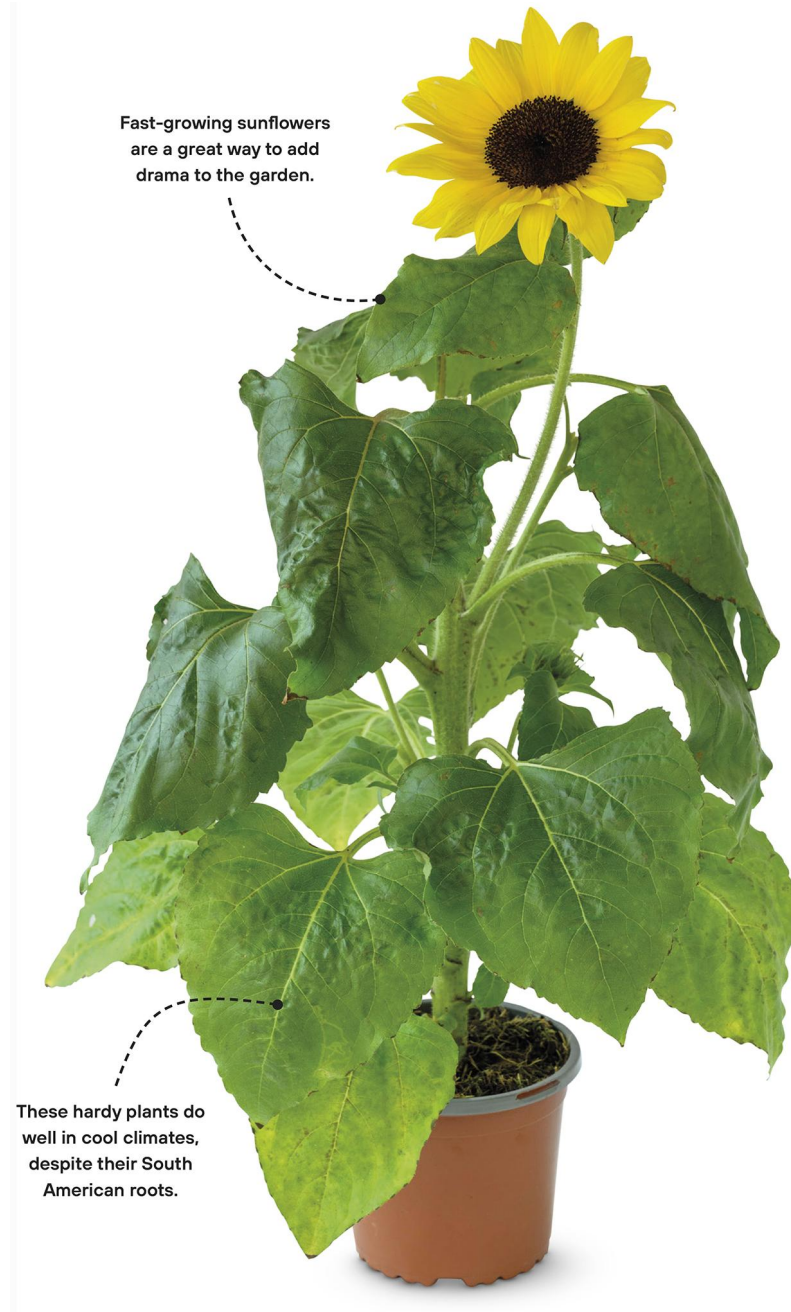
from seed

Sunflowers originate from the warm climates of central and southern America, yet do amazingly well in cooler climates, too. They are hardy annuals and must be one of the most vibrantly coloured flowers out there. When grown en masse, the giant yellow flowers provide the most spectacular golden display in the garden. I love them, and they really do feel like a ray of sunshine. They are fast growers and a brilliant way of getting additional height into the garden for minimum effort.

I buy sunflower seeds that have been removed from their husks, but seeds still contained in this outer shell are fine, too. Sunflowers grow easily from the seeds, and this hack is so much cheaper than buying from plant nurseries. Although your sunflowers won't be a named variety, all the sunflowers I have grown from supermarket packets have been stunningly beautiful. If you don't have space, then you can grow them as microgreens. Their tiny young shoots and emerging miniature leaves are delicious and very healthy. To grow microgreens you don't need much space, just a spot on a sunny windowsill. Use the method for [chia seeds](#).

You will need

- + 9cm (3½in) plant pots
- + Peat-free, general-purpose compost
- + Sunflower seeds
- + Kitchen paper
- + Mister or spray bottle



Fast-growing sunflowers are a great way to add drama to the garden.

These hardy plants do well in cool climates, despite their South American roots.

how to grow



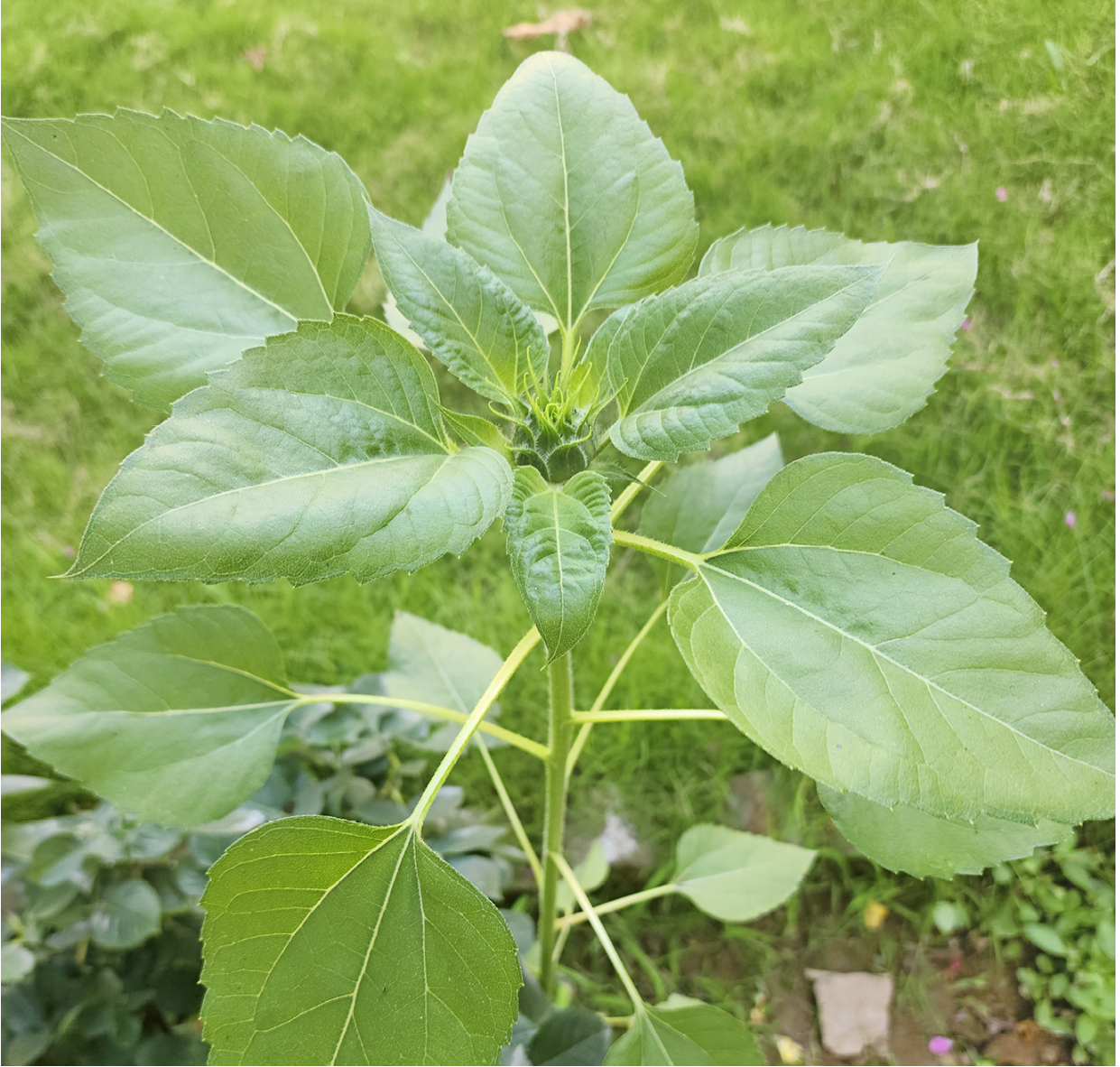
01 Fill a pot with peat-free, general-purpose compost to just below the top.



02 Use your finger to push a single sunflower seed 2cm ($\frac{3}{4}$ in) below the surface.



03 Backfill the hole with the surrounding compost. Water the pot and leave on a sunny windowsill.



04 Plant outside when the sunflower is about 10cm (4in) high.



05 If you want to grow them as microgreens, sprinkle the seeds onto kitchen paper and mist with water. Keep on a sunny windowsill, watering every couple of days.



06 After about a week the sunflowers will have germinated. The edible young shoots can be harvested with scissors, cutting at the base of the individual plants.

Let it thrive

Sunflowers can reach over 2m (6½ft), so give each plant plenty of space – ideally about 40cm (16in) between each one. Individual

plants may also need staking with a sturdy cane to prevent their weighty flowerheads flopping over. Once they have finished flowering, you can leave the flowerheads for the birds to feed on. Don't forget to collect a few seeds yourself, so you can do the same again the following year.

Hack.39

Hazelnuts

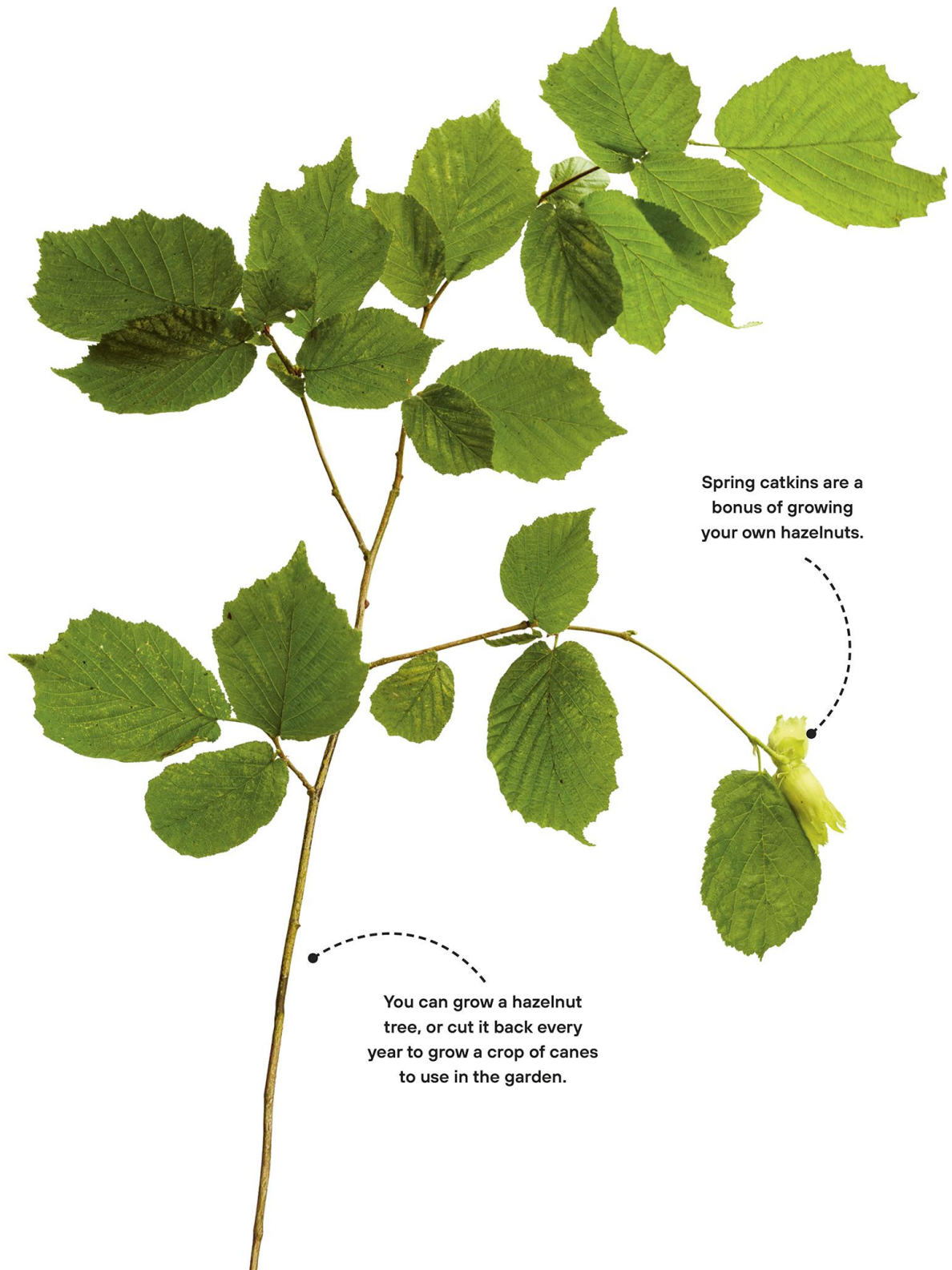
from nuts

Hazelnuts are deciduous, small trees or bushes that make an attractive feature in any garden. Not only do they produce one of my favourite nuts, but they also produce pretty, long catkins in winter and early spring. They are a useful plant as well, as their flexible branches can be used for training and supporting plants. Hazels are fully hardy and need to be grown outside.

Hazelnuts can be grown in large pots on a balcony or patio courtyard, but you will need some sort of outside space if you don't have a garden. The seeds benefit from stratification, which means providing the seed with a cold environment for a few weeks to break its dormancy and prompt it to germinate. If you are starting in spring, you could place them in the fridge for a few weeks to chill, but chances are that the shop you bought them from will have already had them in a cold store, so it probably isn't necessary. Hazelnuts can be grown as trees, or they can be coppiced each year to produce young, whippy stakes and canes. Coppicing involves cutting the growth of the tree back to near ground level to encourage new, healthy and vigorous shoots.

You will need

- + Hazelnuts
- + Nutcracker or hammer
- + 9cm (3½in) plant pot
- + Peat-free, general-purpose compost



Spring catkins are a
bonus of growing
your own hazelnuts.

You can grow a hazelnut
tree, or cut it back every
year to grow a crop of canes
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how to grow



01 Break open the outer shell of a hazelnut using nutcrackers, or gently tap it with a hammer, taking care not to damage the nut inside. Sometimes supermarket hazelnuts also have an outer husk, which should be removed.



02 Repeat to get two or three nuts. Fill a 9cm (3½in) pot with peat-free, general-purpose compost.



03 Push the nuts below the surface with your finger, to a depth of 2cm ($\frac{3}{4}$ in). Leave outside over winter. In spring the seeds will germinate.



04 When your hazel plants are about 15cm (6in) high they can be planted outside in a container or directly into the ground. They require moist but well-drained soil in full sun.

Let it thrive

Hazelnuts produce both male and female flowers (the catkins) on the same bush. They are therefore monoecious, meaning it is possible for them to pollinate themselves, but crops will be better if you plant more than one bush in the area. Hazelnuts are wind pollinated, so if you are lucky and have a largish garden, you can plant a few in a grid to ensure maximum pollination instead of planting a single row of bushes (by the way, if you have a few hazelnut trees in your garden, it is known as a “plat” rather than an orchard). Plant the bushes 5m (16ft) apart. Prune hazel trees when they are dormant in winter. If you are pruning for hazelnuts, then cut back the new growth to a few buds. If you are wanting to coppice the bush then cut down to near ground level every couple of years to encourage fresh, new shoots.



Hack.40

Quinoa

microgreens from seed

Quinoa is an edible seed, high in protein and fibre and therefore considered by some to be a superfood. It's closely related to amaranth and even the weed “fat hen”. It has been grown as a staple crop in South America for thousands of years, but it is a fairly new (and trendy) ingredient in Europe. Some British farmers are now growing it, too.

Because quinoa is a seed and not a grain, when you buy a packet of quinoa from the supermarket you are actually buying a packet of seeds. This is why they are so easy to grow! Quinoa is an herbaceous perennial and although most people will grow it for its seeds, it is also possible to grow it as a microgreen. For microgreens, you will be harvesting the tiny emerging shoots and leaves while they are very young and tender.

You will need

- + Container with drainage holes
- + Peat-free, general-purpose compost
- + Packet of quinoa
- + Propagator (optional, see [How to make a propagator](#))



how to grow



01 Fill a container or a seed tray with peat-free, general-purpose compost to just below the top. Lightly sprinkle the seeds over the surface.



02 Cover the seeds with a tiny amount more of compost – literally 1mm ($\frac{1}{32}$ in) and no more. Give the seeds some water to encourage germination.



03 Leave on a warm, sunny windowsill. If you have a propagator, put your container in that.



04 Water the plants every couple of days. You should see emerging shoots after 10 days or so.



05 Harvest the microgreens when the emerging seedlings are 3–4cm (1¼–1½in) high. Use scissors to cut the seedlings at their base and add the microgreens to salads.

Let it thrive

Microgreens are fairly short-lived, but they will sometimes regenerate after harvesting if you keep them watered and in sunlight.

The next crop or two won't be as vigorous as the first. When they fail to re-shoot, put the contents of the container in the compost and start again with fresh seeds and compost. It is almost as easy to sow a fresh batch to keep you regularly supplied with these nutritious young shoots.

Good seed

Microgreens can also be grown from [chia seeds](#), [sunflower seeds](#), and melon, cucumber, and broccoli seeds.

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Glossary

Annual Annuals live for just one year before setting seed and dying.

Adventitious roots A preliminary set of roots that plants often send out to look for moisture and nutrients so that they can sustain themselves and start growing. They also send out adventitious roots during periods of stress when deprived of the necessary nutrients and water for growing.

Anther Part of a flower's male reproductive organs, which contains the pollen.

Anthocyanin A water-soluble flavonoid and antioxidant that is found in red, blue, and purple fruits and vegetables.

Biennial A plant that lives for two years before setting seed and dying.

Blanching Covering emerging stems so they remain white (see [Blanching celery](#)).

Bromeliad A diverse group of tender plants grown for their flamboyant and colourful displays. They usually have strap-like leaves and although most are grown as ornamentals some, such as pineapple, are grown for their fruit.

Catkin Many trees and shrubs produce pollen on long, dangly flowers known as catkins; a popular example is hazel bushes. They rely on the wind to blow the pollen onto female flowers (which can also be catkins) in order to be pollinated.

Cloche Cloches are used to cover over plants and protect them from the cold, often at the start or end of the season to extend the growing period. Although traditional cloches are bell shaped ("cloche" is French for "bell") and placed over individual plants, they are now more often tunnel shaped to protect entire rows of crops.

Compost A medium used to grow plants in. It is usually a mix of organic material that has been rotted down and decomposed. See [here](#) to make your own at home.

Crocks Broken bits of pottery put in the bottom of a plant pot over the drainage holes prior to adding compost. The theory is that it will prevent the compost washing away when plants are watered

without impeding the drainage. Often stones or even coffee filters are used as an alternative for crocks in the bottom of the pots.

Dibber A stick used to create a hole in the soil to plant seeds, usually the width and length of a pencil. Gardeners often use a pencil or pen as a substitute; I often use my finger to create a hole.

Die back Some plants start to die back from the tips if they are underfed, lack water, or have a disease.

Dioecious With the male and female parts appearing on separate plants.

Earthing up Piling soil around emerging shoots as they grow (see [Earthing up](#)).

Ericaceous compost An acidic compost required by some plants, such as blueberries and cranberries.

Filament The lower section of the male part of the flower that supports the anther (containing the pollen).

First leaves Most plants produce an initial pair of leaves (called cotyledons) that are different to the “true” leaves that appear later when the plant is established.

General-purpose compost Organic material, usually free from loam (soil), suitable for most gardening tasks such as filling containers. A good option if you only want to buy one type of compost.

Germination The point at which the seeds first develop into growing plants, or seedlings.

Hardy Used of plants that will tolerate cold temperatures and frosts and can be left outside over winter.

Legume A group of plants belonging to the pea and bean family, including broad beans, lentils, chickpeas, and many more.

Lobe Some leaves have a curvy shape, and the parts of the leaf that bulges out is said to be lobe-shaped.

Monoecious With both the male and female parts of the flower on one plant.

Node The fancy name for a bud, which is where emerging shoots or leaves will grow from.

The space between each node is called an internode.

Perennial Plants live for varying lengths of time; and perennials will live for a few years.

Perlite Tiny, lightweight, round, white pieces of volcanic glass that have been heated to a high temperature. Commonly added to compost mixes to increase drainage and aeration.

Potting compost A mix with more loam (soil) than general-purpose compost, and designed for potting up plants after they've germinated. Contains the correct nutrients for recently germinated seeds.

Propagator A tray used to encourage seeds to germinate (see [Raising new plants for free](#)).

Pricking out Removing new seedlings from where they were sown, if they've germinated among lots of other seedlings, and planting them in individual pots or in the soil. This ensures they have enough space to grow.

Rhizome A type of underground storage vessel, similar to a root, which supplies the plant with nutrients.

Seed compost A friable mix, easy to sow seeds into. It will contain the appropriate nutrients required for seed germination.

Stratification A cool period of dormancy required before some seeds germinate. This is a natural defence technique for plants in the wild that prevents seeds germinating in autumn when tender young seedlings might not survive the winter. You can fake the stratification process by sticking seeds in a fridge for a few weeks before sowing.

Tender Plants that can't cope with frosts or cold temperatures are called tender. There are various levels of tenderness, and in some regions, zones that denote which plants will survive depending on their hardiness or tenderness.

True leaves The leaves that appear once a plant is establishing itself. They closely resemble the leaves on the mature plant, hence the name.

Vermiculite Tiny, pale, flake-like minerals with excellent moisture-retentive qualities. It is usually placed over compost when propagating seeds and cuttings to retain moisture and prevent competitive weeds germinating.

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Simon Akeroyd has written over 30 gardening books. He shares gardening tips and advice on his social media pages, which currently have over 1.5 million followers.

Simon runs one-day gardening experiences based on his books as Simon Akeroyd's Gardening Academy, which he hosts in Surrey and Devon.

He was previously Garden Manager for both the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) and National Trust. Gardens he has managed include Wisley, Polesden Lacey, Harlow Carr, Sheffield Park, Coletton Fishacre, Agatha Christie's Greenway, and currently Painshill in Surrey.

In his spare time Simon loves canoeing on the River Dart or exploring Dartmoor (and usually getting lost). He's currently writing a collection of Murder Mystery short stories with a horticultural twist.

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